IMF forecasts higher economic growth for RP in '04

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PHILIPPINE DAILY
INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

Friday, December 19, 2003 + 32 pages / sections / vol. 19 / no. [illegible] P15

'Dyip ni Gloria'

By Juliet L. Javellana

LOOK who's riding the jeepney now. The symbol of Joseph Estrada's successful run for the presidency in 1998 may soon be associated with the woman who succeeded him in office.

Leaders of the big jeepney operators and drivers associations, claiming some 400,000 members nationwide, yesterday presented to President

STORY A10

SANTA'S NUMBER

A Santa Claus carries the "nine-nine," today's lottery dance craze, with some real-estate on the fast-dancing ground. The merry man of love is taking part in a traditional gift-giving event.

Do a Laurel, GMA ally urges Roco

By Armand Nocum and Dona Pazzibugan

AN OFFICIAL of the civil society group Kusanggang Pilipino yesterday asked presidential aspirant Raul Roco to be a statesman by sliding down to be President Macapagal Arroyo's vice president for the May elections.

Teresita Saliman, a Malacañang appointee, recalled how Salonga "Doy" Laurel heeded the advice of former Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin to be the running mate of Corazon Aquino in the snap presidential election called by President Ferdinand Marcos.

Saliman, a commissioner at the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission, who was then actively supporting Aquino, noted that although Laurel had prepared to run for president and had built up a strong party, he agreed to run under Aquino, "mortifying well-prepared plans and machinery" intended to catapult him to the highest post in the land.

But Roco said Kusanggang Pilipino got its analogy wrong.

"There is no comparison between GMA and Cory. GMA is the 'Marcos' here because she represents the establishment. She is not 'Cory.' She is not loved like Cory was loved. She is disliked.

"We are the insurgents," Roco said when reached by phone.

Sen. Aquilino Pimentel also had to

GO A10/A11/A18 >

'No admission, no amnesty'

Barbers: Pardon only for those who confess

By Christine O. Avendaño and Michael Lim Ubac

ONLY THOSE who will acknowledge the crimes of which they are accused and those who will declare "every penny" they stole from the national coffers should be qualified for the general amnesty planned by President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Three suggestions, from Sen. Robert Barbers of the ruling Lakas-CMD and opposition Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr., respectively were among the comments aired yesterday in the wake of the President's announcement Wednesday that she would grant general amnesty not only to Marcos sycophants and communist rebels but also to "those involved in past political conflicts."

"They should first admit the crimes imputed to them before they qualify [for amnesty]," Barbers told reporters. He also said that a committee should be formed to set the criteria for qualification, and that its members should be of "known integrity."

Pimentel said Ms Macapagal should exercise extreme caution in extending amnesty to or allowing out of court settlements with her political enemies.

"If there is going to be a compromise, all the hidden wealth should be reported first, and then a compromise can be arrived at on that basis. They should declare everything, every penny they took from the nation's coffers," he said.

He added that criminal liability could subsequently be "worked at."

Pimentel noted that the heirs of the late strongman Ferdinand Marcos had earlier offered to enter into a compromise agreement with the victims of human rights violations during martial law, using their $683 million Swiss account.

"But there could be more," said Pimentel, who was jailed four times during the Marcos dictatorship.

He said it was important that the people would not be shortchanged through Ms Macapagal's proposed general

FULL STORY/A10/A18

RECOVERY WARD

Col. Arthur Quintal, a military doctor, takes to Lt. Galileo Kintanar, aka Commander Bimat of the Abu Sayyaf, at Camp Aguinaldo Medical Center in Quezon City. Bimat, whose real name is unknown, was captured by the Armed Forces in a gunbattle in Jolo on Dec. 7. The photo, released by the AFP yesterday, was taken on Dec. 17.

AFP/A10

Debrah Lyn's pa won't be home for Christmas

By Norman Bordadora

STRIKE a thought for Danny Mendragon.

A factory worker on a hunger strike in Saudi Arabia, Mendragon will likely miss the baptism of his 6-month-old daughter, a daughter he has not yet seen, on Sunday.

Mendragon is one of 76 overseas contract workers who left their places of work in the desert Kingdom because their wages remained unpaid or because they were maltreated by their employers. Now the 76 are stranded in the capital city of Riyadh.

The workers, who formed the Rapid Response Group of Migrante Stranded in Riyadh (or the brotherhood of migrants stranded in Riyadh), is now on its sixth day of a hunger strike in the Philippine Embassy. Their protest is meant to pressure the Philippine government into repatriating them in time for International Day of Migrants, which was yesterday.

Carrying the baby Debrah Lyn in her arms, Mendragon's wife told the reporter: "We ask President Macapagal-Arroyo to help us. My husband no longer works in Jeddah because his employer didn't pay him for months." Mendragon's wife, Anna, was carrying the 6-month-old daughter De-

DEBARATE A10

'Bulacan's modern day hero'

By Carmela Reyes
PDI Central Luzon Desk
and Jerome Aning

THE TITLE "Bulacan's modern-day hero" has been conferred on the late foreign secretary Blas Ople, who was earlier called by his former colleagues in the Senate a deregal, prophet, and an exegete.

The municipal council of Hagonoy gave Ople the honorific title in a resolution, which also declared today a non-working holiday in his hometown to give residents, friends and supporters the chance to pay their last respects to the man they called "Ka Blas" or "Amang."

Mayor Felix Ople, son of the late foreign secretary, thanked his colleagues in the local government for honoring his father.

Ople's remains were brought to Hagonoy yesterday from the Department of Foreign Affairs in Pasay City, where employees erupted into cheers of "Hip Hip Hooray!" and applause as the hearse carrying his remains left the building.

Gov. Josefina de la Cruz, Vice Gov. Amelito Flamenco, other Bulacan officials and residents met the hearse at the Barangay Tabang toll gate in Guiguinto town and accompanied it to Hagonoy.

Black ribbons were hung along the roads on the electric posts leading to the National Shrine of St. Anne in Barangay Poblacion where a Mass for Ople was scheduled yesterday afternoon.

The remains will be transferred to the Ople residence in Barangay Sta. Monica and will stay there until Saturday morning.

Ople's remains will be taken to the

A10/A11/A18 >

Health secretary warns of renewed SARS threat

HEALTH Secretary Manuel Dayrit yesterday sounded the alarm on the possible resurgence of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in the country, but said the government was prepared to meet the threat.

Dayrit issued the warning after the World Health Organization confirmed on Wednesday that a military scientist in Taiwan had tested positive for SARS. He said the screening and monitoring of passengers from abroad has been heightened to prevent the transmission of the deadly virus.

According to Dayrit, the Department of Health has been strengthening health facilities for months and preparing SARS isolation rooms that would meet international standards.

He said the DOH has also pursued the training of its health workers to deal with not just SARS but all kinds of infectious diseases.

The San Lazaro Hospital, the Research Institute for Tropical Medicine and the Lung Center of the Philippines have been found to meet WHO standards for isolation rooms and health care for such cases, he said.

"The system is in place," Dayrit said. "We have never let our guard down ... We learn by experience, as it pays to listen to [the Taiwanese] now that they are under attack by SARS again."

SARS-infected thousands and claimed the lives of hundreds worldwide, including two Filipinos, middle of this year. The

HEALTH A10

IN SIGN OF SARS on a Taipei Mrt pass through thermal scanner at the Mrt, as a quarantine officer looks on. The airport is on red-alert as its first case reported in Taiwan.

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Clear skies over RP to wait another 5 years

SMOG over major Philippine cities may not start to clear for at least another five years after the government said on Wednesday it would delay the implementation of rules compelling industry and other sectors to switch to low-sulphur diesel.

The new Clean Air Act (CAA) has mandated a cut in the sulphur content of diesel products to 0.05 percent from 0.20 percent to reduce its harmful effects on the environment and human health.

Petron Corp. and Pilipinas Shell Petroleum Corp. have started selling low-sulphur diesel in Manila to comply with the law.

But operators of small boats and owners of power plants, including state-run National Power Corp., were among those appealing for a delay. Energy Secretary Vincent Perez told a conference on air pollution.

Local companies, which get their diesel from various suppliers other than Petron and Pilipinas Shell, said having a uniform standard would have them to pass on the cost to customers, Perez said.

Other big consumers of diesel are manufacturers and exporters that use generators.

"Considering the clamor from Indus-

CLEAR A11

WEATHER FORECAST

Second FRONTPAGE

Germans may talk to Robot

YOU CAN talk to him but you can't have him.

President Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday said the Philippines will let German prosecutors interrogate Abu Sayyaf leader Galib Andang, but any request for his custodion was premature.

Andang, a.k.a. Commander Robot, was captured in Indanan, Sulu, on Dec. 7, more than three years after allegedly leading an Abu Sayyaf raid on the Malaysian island of Sipadan to take a group of 21 European and Asian tourists hostage.

A case is pending against him and the week it started Manila is ready to hand over to Jakarta the abductors of the Malaysian tourists, who were among the group held for several months on Jolo.

"Commander Robot may be facing charges in Germany but he will face the music in the Philippines first," President Macapagal said in a recent statement.

"We assure the German government Commander Robot will be treated and available for questioning by their prosecutors, but talk about his extradition is premature.

"We will have to be prosecuted and tried by a Philippine court for the crimes he committed against our people," she added. "Philippine justice is successful and will be pursued upon."

Andang, even if he were so inclined, would find it hard to escape after his left leg was amputated after he was shot up during his capture. Officials said he could face the death penalty if convicted.

The military had said Robot's capture was the result of good debriefing by the Intelligence Service of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Today the ISAFP officer who drew up the plan that resulted in the successful operation will receive an award at ceremonies marking the 69th anniversary of the AFP.

Lt. Col. Ambrocio E. Unabia, commander of Military Intelligence Group 9, will receive an Outstanding Achievement Medal from President Macapagal, the guest of honor at the Camp Aguinaldo rites.

Unabia, a classmate of Philippine Military Academy Class 84, was cheek-of-with comrade-in-arms Brig. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia and Maj. Gen. Narciso Abaya, chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

Other members include the Marine officer who was ground commander of the forces that quelled the July 27 Oakwood mutiny, and an Army captain, co-hostage of the mutineers, who led an operation that captured a rebel colonel.

Maj. Gen. Emmanuel Teodosio, Marine commander who coordinated the military action against the mutineers, will be awarded the Philippine Legion of Honor medal.

Col. Jaquilino Ubiena, commanding officer of the Army's 37th Infantry Battalion, will receive the Distinguished Conduct Star, the second highest award after the Medal of Valor, for leading the operation that led to the capture of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's Camp Omar in Datu Piang, Maguindanao in February 2000.

Commander Teodosio Tanglay, commander of Naval Base Cavite, will receive the Distinguished Service Star, the third highest award, for foiling an attempt by the mutineers to loot the Naval Sea Systems Command's arsenal and for initiating rehabilitation projects and assisting in the rescue of passengers of a plane that had crashed. EJ Ikaprande/AFP

MILF to return captured soldiers

By TJ Burgonio

MA-PADU-I fighting was reported in Maguindanao between government troops and Moro Islamic Liberation Front rebels yesterday as members of a joint ceasefire committee traveled to the nearby interior of Datu Piang town for the hand-over of four soldiers that were captured by the guerrillas.

But military officials said it would prove dicey to launch operations against the Wahigan faction of the renegade MILF commander in the province even after agreeing to a truce that took effect last Wednesday.

Armed Forces vice chief Lt. Gen. Rodolfo Garcia said that MILF commanders and rebels would be pulled out of their positions in Datu Piang and placed in an "area of temporary stay" in the town to allow the military to pursue the kidnap gang.

He stressed that the rebels would be thoroughly screened to isolate Pentagon gang members who might try to pass as them.

"That way, they won't hamper the pursuit operations," he said.

Fighting had broken out between the government and the MILF in Maguindanao last Saturday and continued upto Monday after MILF guerrillas allegedly attacked government troops pursuing members of the Pentagon kidnap gang that abducted Filipino-Chinese car dealer Norman Sy.

The fighting left both sides with at least 13 dead and threatened to delay the resumption of peace talks scheduled for early January.

Late Tuesday, Garcia and Brgy. Midtimbang, his MILF counterpart to the joint committee on the cessation of hostilities (CCCH), forged a truce that would involve the withdrawal of MILF forces from Datu Piang so the military could flush out the kidnappers.

But MILF spokesperson Eid Kabalu said this was a "broken promise."

"The kidnap gang is not in the area. If they were there, we would have captured or spotted five as many. The military just wants to save face," he said.

Garcia said it was highly possible that the Pentagon gang commander Jeke Tagum, who led the gang that abducted Sy, was within the area.

Two days after the suspension of fighting yesterday, Garcia said the cease-fire was holding.

"There are no incidents today. The agreements by both sides to exercise restraint and not to launch offensive is holding," he said.

Yesterday, members of the CCCH travelled by barge through the marshes to Datu Piang for the handover of four soldiers—PFC. Alex Sumang and Privates First Class Ariel Dilosalen and Wilfredo Casilihan Jr.—captured by the rebels in the encounter in Gensang, Datu Saudi town on Monday.

Garcia said there would also be an exchange of wounded and dead, adding the handover was "a big step" in the peace process.

The time of the exchange depended on "how fast we can travel," adding that the venue of the handover was an area away from combat city.

The MILF did not ask for anything in exchange for handing over the captured soldiers.

"Our only demand is for the media to be present during the hand-over so that the soldiers could express what they have experienced in our camps," Kabalu said in a phone interview.

The military complained that the MILF attack on the troops pursuing the Pentagon gang last Monday was a violation of an existing cease-fire agreement would be the subject of future talks, said Garcia.

"What's important is that the cease-fire is holding, there is no fighting anymore. The armed confrontation should stop. The urgent task is to locate the soldiers and to have the wounded get some treatment," he said.

Typhoon FPJ to blow Ping away—Pimentel

By Michael Lim Ubac and Christine O. Avendaño

OPPOSITION Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. yesterday warned Sen. Panfilo Lacson he would be "marginalized" in the ranks of the opposition should he persist in pursuing his presidential bid.

Pimentel said government opposition personalities and their supporters were solidly behind the standard-bearer of the Koalisyon ng Magkakaisang Pilipino, who happens to be actor-Fernando Poe Jr.

"Since the typhoon called FPJ is coming, he (Lacson) should take shelter while the storm rages," Pimentel said.

Lacson, the other day said he would still run for president even after Poe announced at a Cha-Cha/Sigaw rally that he was not withdrawing from the race.

Lacson said he was left with no choice but to press on after it appeared Poe had reneged on a promise to go through a selection process.

To which Pimentel replied: "It's more of braggadocio than realistic."

Pimentel acknowledged that Poe, as a strong vote getter, "comes with the force of a powerful typhoon if we were to use an analogy."

Fernando Poe Jr. has the big drawing power that could satisfy the nation. But this only could be quite ephemeral if it is not based on a solid platform," Pimentel said.

"Without a credible platform of government, an incoming president will have nothing to offer to the people, especially after the first 100 days in office, during which he traditionally enjoys a honeymoon with the press," he said.

For his part, Lacson yesterday scored Sen. Edgardo Angara for forming the newly formed Koalisyon ng Magkakaisang Pilipino (KMP) was the true opposition.

In an interview over dzBB radio, Lacson said Angara spoke too soon when he said the KMP was the unified opposition, noting that the true coalition was not even recognized by the Commission on Elections as a political party.

"The KMP is composed of the Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino, the Partido ng Masang Pilipino and PDP-Laban.

₱865B FOR 2004

House OKs nat'l budget

By Cynthia D. Balana

THE HOUSE of Representatives late Wednesday passed on third and final reading the ₱865.6-billion proposed national budget for 2004, described as "anchored on continuity of reforms and fiscal discipline."

"This budget is in consonance with the three-pronged priorities of the Macapagal government: to provide for basic public services, eliminate graft and corruption and ensure peace and order," said Speaker Jose de Venecia.

He credited the efforts of the various parties in helping to beat the Dec. 19 Christmas adjournment to pass the measure.

The parties included the ruling Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats, the Nacionalista People's Coalition now headed by Rep. Alfredo Marañon Jr., the Liberal Party led by Rep. Florencio Abad, the Nacionalista Party, Aksyon Demokratiko, and the opposition Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino.

Objective

President Macapagal-Arroyo has said that the 2004 General Appropriations Act will be her administration's commitment to fiscal responsibility and discipline with the objective of gradually returning to a balanced budget position in the medium term.

The 2004 budget was 6.6 percent higher than the current outlay of ₱811.3 billion and a booster investment on strategic areas that have multiplier effects on poverty alleviation and economy such as education, agriculture and agrarian reform, industry and tourism, fighting terrorism and lawlessness, and housing.

The top 10 departments that received the bulk of the budget were the Department of Education, ₱110.5 billion; Department of Public Works and Highways, ₱84.2 billion; Department of National Defense, ₱45.1 billion; Department of Interior and Local Government, ₱43.9 billion; Department of Agriculture, ₱15.3 billion; Department of Agrarian Reform, ₱14.8 billion; Department of Health, ₱18.4 billion; Department of Transportation and Communications, ₱9.7 billion; Judiciary, ₱7.8 billion and Department of Finance, ₱6.6 billion.

Budget Secretary Emilia Boncodin, who submitted the proposed budget on Aug. 6, said the 2004 budget was aimed at reducing the budget deficit in the coming years through spending restraint and ensuring the generation of the required level of revenues.

Tax measures

The government intends to generate revenue base targets to ₱671.1 billion from this year's ₱604.1 billion by pushing for passage of several revenue legislation.

The President urged Congress to pass the tax measures aimed at the imposition of the excise tax on oil products, the rationalization of the documentary stamp tax, and the creation of several revenue legislation.

After the 2004 a total of ₱52.9 billion will be spent for infrastructure, of which ₱38.5 billion, or 58 percent, will be spent for foreign-assisted projects.

Some ₱21.7 billion will be used for the construction, paving and improvement of 38,009 km of roads, and the construction, replacement and rehabilitation of 32,750 linear meters of bridges, including flyovers, interchanges and overpasses. This amount, according to Boncodin, also included some ₱1.3 billion for farm-to-market roads.

IMF urges higher taxes

By Clarissa S. Batino

THE INTERNATIONAL Monetary Fund is urging the cash-strapped government to impose higher taxes on beer, tobacco, fuel and text messaging, and warned that a plan to grant tax amnesty before elections would be unfair to the growing economy.

But the measures the IMF is proposing would also make President Macapagal-Arroyo unpopular in the crucial months before the May elections.

The fund yesterday concluded its periodic review of the Philippine economy under a post-program monitoring arrangement started in 2000. The review should have ended up this month, but the Macapagal administration has extended it for another year.

In a briefing, the multilateral agency said it has decided to upgrade its forecast on the growth in the country's gross domestic product to 4.2% percent, from 4 percent as bigwarded.

IMF head of mission Hinohiko Takeda, who is also senior adviser for the Asia-Pacific, said the government should remain vigilant on tax administration and spending if it wants to sustain the fiscal discipline established this year.

"Consideration should be given to specific policy measures, such as raising and indexing excise taxes on alcohol, tobacco and petroleum products, in addition to other possible steps," the agency said in a statement.

Takeda admitted that the IMF continued to press for new taxes on robust sectors of the economy, like telecommunications—text messaging in particular. He said earlier IMF proposals to raise the 10 percent value-added tax rate likewise remained on the table.

"It will also be important to enact proposals for new tax measures, given the harmful impact that repeated amnesties have on taxpayer compliance," the Fund stressed.

The IMF doubted that the projected ₱9.4-billion collection from the tax amnesty pending before Congress would materialize. The 10 amnesty laws passed during the time of Marcos yielded a collection of only ₱1.5 billion, and three amnesties during the time of Aquino, only ₱1.27 billion.

Takeda said the Fund foresaw continued volatility in the country because of the forthcoming elections, but cited the resiliency of the Philippine economy, which enabled it to withstand shocks.

Although confident that the government could confine the budget deficit to the ₱165-billion ceiling this year, the agency refused to say whether it was possible to achieve next year's target of ₱139.8 billion.

GMA blames politicians, not terrorists, for economic woes

MANILA, Philippines — Not terrorists or kidnappers, but politicians are to blame for the continued erosion of investor confidence in the country, according to President Macapagal-Arroyo.

In a statement issued yesterday, the President said: "We shelve some problems in economic confidence but these do not arise from the threat of terrorism at present and unlike related issues. We are winning the war against terrorism and crime; what triggers uncertainty is the heavy atmosphere of politicking and partisan distress."

Ms Macapagal said the country's economic fundamentals remained solid with the deficit under control. Unfortunately, she said, this piece of positive news has been largely ignored by investors who have been driven crazy by too much noise from the political arena, with less than six months before election day.

She has long complained that too much politicking by top rivals has been a distraction in most pressing matters in governance. She has also said the division between various sectors in society has held up implementation of urgent reforms.

The President's statement was short on the politicians in her camp and her own political activities, although it insisted that the country needed "continuity and discipline". She has stepped up her call for reconciliation, announcing a plan to grant general amnesty to both rebels and political prisoners.

Gil Cabacungan Jr.

Comelec to purge bets' list

By Marvin P. Nuñez

THE COMMISSION on Elections will start weeding out nuisance candidates next week.

This was revealed yesterday by Comelec chair Benjamin Abalos who said that there are no needless extra parties on file a position before the hearings start.

"We do not have to wait for somebody to complain, we could qualify the commission is granted the authority to qualify people for the position, it is for this reason that starting next week, we have already scheduled about 25 of them to be heard...they would be given due course. So explain why they should not be disqualified," Abalos said in a television interview yesterday afternoon.

The process will begin next week and end about the end of the month, he added.

Traditionally, the Comelec disqualifies candidates who do not have the funds and the machinery to wage a national campaign.

Rapist escapes death sentence as prosecution bungles case

By Philip C. Tubeza

A RAPE convict got an early Christmas gift from the Supreme Court after the tribunal reduced his sentence from death to 40 years in prison even though he had abused his own daughter.

The high court cited the prosecution's failure to have the victim affirm in open court that she was raped on Christmas Day in 1996.

"The prosecution failed to prove that appellant is indeed [the victim's] father and that she was under 18 years of age when the crime of rape was committed against her. Because of the prosecution's failure to prove her relationship with appellant and her minority, we cannot hold appellant liable for qualified rape. Hence, to impose perpetua, and not death, is the correct penalty," said 22-page ruling penned by Associate Justice Adolfo Azcuna.

The SC also reduced the civil indemnity the convict had to pay to his daughter from P75,000 to P50,000. However, it ordered the convict to pay her P50,000 in moral damages.

He was convicted of qualified rape and sentenced to death by the Malabon Regional Trial Court on May 2, 2002 for raping his daughter on Dec. 25, 1996 and again on Oct. 25, 1997.

But when the SC reviewed the cases, it found that the prosecution was negligent in proving the rape and acquitted him of the charge that he raped his daughter in 1996.

"[The victim] failed to state in open court that appellant raped her on Dec. 25, 1996 with the use of force and intimidation.

Espino tops Red Cross election

LEILA Espino, former governor and chief operations officer of the Philippine Airlines, topped the recent election of nine new governors of the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC).

The election capped the three-day 26th PNRC biennial national convention held at the Manila Pavilion Hotel on Nov. 9-11, 2003.

Second place was Leocadio "Bobby" Ortiz while Leandro Leviste placed third.

Other winning candidates were Jaime Lennon from Laguna, Mickey Aguinaldo, Celso Lobregat, Boy Bermejo Sinsat, former PNRC secretary general Leandro Leviste and Rolando Hoffman.

Three of them were reelectionists—Ortiz, Leviste and Hoffman. Except for Quezon and Leyte, the rest were newcomers to the PNRC board of governors.

The board of governors is the highest policy making body of the PNRC.

Election of nine of Story of the PNRC board of governors will be held early next month.

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CURE BAD BREATH NOW!

Stop jueteng now, Ebdane tells PNP

By Gil Cabacungan Jr.

PHILIPPINE National Police Director Gen. Edgardo Ebdane has vowed to crush all jueteng operations nationwide before Christmas as he warned police officials who fail to carry out his order would be given the boot.

In a briefing in Malacañang, Ebdane said he ordered all regional commanders nationwide last December 16 to continue "anti-jueteng operations, make arrests and file the cases in court to eventually stop jueteng operations."

"We would like that all operations be stopped in less than a week," said Ebdane who noted that the order would be implemented nationwide, including areas operating in the Pasay and Bilibid domain.

In underscoring how serious he was in stopping the betting, Ebdane said he has adopted a one-strike rule in the anti-jueteng drive instead of the normal three-strike rule, which meant to award chances for field commanders, regional commanders, provincial directors and chiefs of police who fail to carry out his order. Ebdane said he would send out intelligence officers nationwide to monitor the performance of subordinates.

"So long as commanders concerned will do it, I don't see any reason why they can't do it. They have to stop it or they will have to go," Ebdane said.

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NPC-Lakas alliance shaky at local level

[illegible] for local posts from congressional to municipality seats threaten the stability of the alliance forged by leaders of the ruling Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats and the Nationalist People's Coalition in Mindanao last Wednesday.

The concern was aired by Iligan Rep. Eleandro Jesus Aggabao (NPC, Indicted) who noted that unless the rule of the majority of the lawmakers is firmly upheld, the covenant would "fall distance."

"It would be a common tradition because local Lakas and NPC leaders could be fighting among themselves at the local level," said Aggabao, who was one of the 25 NPC leaders present during the covenant signing at De Palma.

Aggabao noted that in his own district, Lakas may field a candidate to challenge him in the 2004 congressional elections.

"If a Lakas candidate runs against me, then I will not support the candidacy of President Macapagal-Arroyo and go to the opposition," he said.

But Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. said that these concerns will be settled by Lakas and NPC as allied partners.

Dr. Venecia also said that the covenant signing with the NPC, the party founded by businessman Eduardo Cojuangco Jr., will be immediately followed by a similar pact with the Liberal Party. Cynthia Pabico

The WORLD

Editor Lawrence K. Chavez

US soldier killed in Baghdad ambush

BAGHDAD—Iraqi guerrillas killed a US soldier in an ambush in Baghdad, the US military said on Thursday as two assassinations underlined fears that internal political divisions could erupt into widespread bloodletting.

The soldier's death on Wednesday night was the first combat fatality suffered by US troops since the announcement on Sunday of the capture of ousted Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

In yet another example of how violence that has gripped Iraq since Saddam's capture, an official of the largest Shiite Muslim group was killed by Saddam loyalists on Wednesday.

A representative of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) said Mohammad al-Hakim was shot dead near his home in Baghdad's Sadr district, after receiving death threats from Saddam backers.

The SCIRI official added that in a separate incident an angry crowd in the southern city of Najaf had attacked and killed Ali al-Jabiri, an official of Saddam's Baath party who had planted a code on crushing an uprising by Iraqi Shiites after the 1991 Gulf War.

"What happened was that people surrounded him with guns, and proceeded to shoot and beat him," the official said, identifying the killers only as "residents of Najaf who recognized his criminal."

Political violence has flared among Shiite Shiites, who make up 60 percent of the population, since the fall of Saddam, whose government killed numerous religious leaders of the community he regarded as a fifth column with ties to Shiite Iran.

SCIRI's leader, Ayatollah Mohammed Bager al-Hakim, was killed along with about 80 others in August when a car bomb ripped through one of Shiism's holiest shrines, where Hakim had just led worshippers in prayers.

A US spokesperson said a soldier from the 1st Armored Division died in an ambush in the al-Bartalah neighborhood of Baghdad at 10:30 p.m. on Wednesday. Another soldier and an Iraqi translator were wounded.

The latest fatality brought to 180 the number of soldiers killed in Iraq by hostile fire since Washington declared major combat operations ended.

Earlier in the day US forces swept into the town of Samarra, in the so-called "Sunni triangle" to northern and central Iraq where Saddam had his power base, to flush out guerrillas.

Two brigades ripped Samarra, some 100 km north of Baghdad, saying it "all from the outside world while soldiers from a third brigade made house to house searches. They also secured shops and gas yards.

US forces said they arrested 32 more people in Samarra after sacking 15 suspects on Sunday. They also detained three suspects in Baqubah, some 65 km north of Baghdad.

The US military said three attacks on coalition forces in Iraq on Wednesday killed one soldier and injured 4 others. A car bomb struck a convoy in the northern city of Mosul, it said. Another soldier was wounded.

The soldiers said it had stepped up its offensive to stamp out attacks on US-led occupying forces and Iraqis cooperating with the United States. It blames the attacks on Saddam supporters and foreign Islamic militants.

The US-appointed Governing Council dismissed reports that Saddam, captured by US troops on Saturday in a "spiderhole" hideout in southern Iraq after eight months on the run, had been moved to the Gulf state of Qatar by US forces. Reuters

1003 IMAGE—A young Iraqi girl cries as a British Challenger tank moves in on the Basrah party office in Basra Apr 03, 2003. British and coalition forces took control over Iraq's second city after two weeks of heavy fighting leading to widespread looting as Iraqi forces retreated over the Shatt Al-Arab river

2 new US spooks helped bag Saddam

WASHINGTON—Two junior US military intelligence analysts drew a chart of Saddam Hussein's family and it then names from that led to the capture of the former Iraqi dictator, The Wall Street Journal said Thursday.

From an initial 9,000 names, the two double narrowed the list of Saddam links to 300 names by mid-September, later zeroing in on a key unidentified Iraqi, dubbed "the source," who was captured a day ahead of Saddam's arrest.

The two intelligence officers from the 104th Military Intelligence Battalion, 1st Brigade Iranian, 41, and Cpl. Harold Epstein, 26—said they were totally unsupervised when a superior earlier this year gave them four names associated with Saddam's network of supporters.

"Figure it out, draw the lines, make me a chart and find every crucial person connected to Saddam," they were told.

The two analysts—she a former exercise secretary, he a former high school English teacher—said the task was daunting since it was their first intelligence assignment in military intelligence and they had no idea of the complex structure of the Iraqi intelligence.

"We learned about the Iraqi army, air force, history and tribal cultures before we got here," said Degerson, "but it wasn't until we started working on the chart that it really hit us. The extent and depth of how much the tribes were intertwined and integrated with the Iraqi government and military shocked us."

The classified, four-page 46-by-42-inch color-coded chart with 200 names they developed was nicknamed "Mongo Link" and quickly became known in military circles for its accuracy.

The months of intelligence work put to be tiresome and frustrating, the healthy pair—Williams Barry singled out an individual they believed belonged to Saddam's inner circle and whose several detainees had identified as an influential leader fomenting the resistance.

They also helped the US military to hunt him down and on Friday he was captured in a house said in Baghdad. AFP

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WORLDBRIEFS

Wright flight replica

RALEIGH, North Carolina—An attempt to honor the Wright brothers by re-making their historic first powered flight 100 years ago ended in a muddy failure on Wednesday. Pilot delays caused by rain and a complicated Tar Flyer mishap shrouded plans which called Orville Wright's 36.5-meters on Dec. 17, 1903, ended up in a muddy puddle in 2003. President George W. Bush joked that the event would be watched around the world by "millions & millions & millions" of people. The event was to mark the 100th anniversary of the world's first controlled, heavier-than-air flight. AFP

France headscarf ban

PARIS—French President Jacques Chirac called on Wednesday for a law banning Islamic headscarves and other religious symbols in state schools, denouncing them as divisive in France and around the world. In a televised speech after months of debate on the role of religion in French society which highlighted the difficulties of Muslim integration, Chirac urged parliament to pass the law before the next school year starts in September. The move will extend to other religious symbols including Jewish skullcaps and large Christian crosses, but France's top Muslim representative said it mainly targeted Islam and would further alienate the country's five million Muslims. Reuters

Ex-US governor charged

AUTOMATIC governor, touted as a potential candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize for his stance against the death penalty, has been indicted on corruption with a long-running corruption scandal, prosecutors said Wednesday. Former Illinois Governor George Ryan, who gained fame when he commuted all pending Illinois death sentences, 48 hours before leaving office, was charged with fraudulent behavior in connection with using his position to steer state contracts to cronies. "We are alleging that the State of Illinois was for sale for favorites and friends," said Patrick Fitzgerald, US attorney for the northern district of Illinois, as he spelled out the case against the retired politician. AFP

Reagan shooter

WASHINGTON—John Hinckley, the man who shot US President Ronald Reagan in 1981, on Wednesday got court authorization to make unsupervised visits from Washington's psychiatric hospital to his parents' home in neighboring Virginia. The ruling by the US District Court for the District of Columbia was strongly opposed by Nancy Reagan, the former president's wife, who said she fears for the "safety of the general public." And Reagan himself, till at home in the District of Columbia, said his office remained "concerned." But "Mr. Hinckley still endangers himself or others if granted unsupervised release," Weakley, 48, will now be allowed to make to visit day and overnight visits to his parents' Virginia home without being accompanied by a hospital employee. He is not, however, permitted to travel out of the Washington area. AFP

Disgraced Milosevic expected to win seat in Serbian parliament

BELGRADE—As the world mulls plans for a trial of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, Yugoslavia's ex-strongman and war crimes suspect Slobodan Milosevic is clawing back political influence, showing that disgrace and infamy are no obstacle to a political comeback.

Three years after being driven from office and almost two since his war crimes trial began at The Hague-based Tribunal, former Yugoslav president Milosevic is expected to win a parliamentary seat in this month's elections.

Milosevic (and his former ally ultra-nationalist Vojislav Seselj), are contesting the Dec. 28 elections from their prison cells near The Hague, under laws which bar only convicted prisoners from running for parliament.

Another two war crimes suspects, Deputy Interior Minister General Vlastan Ladic and former army chief of staff Nebojsa Pavkovic—both fugitives from the 161-men's—are also running on separate party lists.

Analysts said that despite a gag order slapped on Milosevic last week by his 159 guards, he and Seselj are likely to win places in the new assembly by taking advantage of the sympathies of ordinary Serbs.

"Both Milosevic and Seselj will almost certainly become deputies after the elections," analyst Srecko Mihailovic said.

"Theoretically speaking, Milosevic or Seselj could even be elected parliamentary speaker, becoming at the same time acting president of Serbia."

Serbia has failed to elect a president three times in the past 23 months due to insufficient turnout. After Dec. 28, the new parliamentary speaker will automatically become acting president until an elected head of state is in place.

Analysts said that even if Milosevic was restrained for the post of speaker he would not win the support of the majority of parliament.

Svetozarevic said a "more real danger" is that an ex-elected deputy he would be able to "decide who of the most loyal party officials enters parliament and through them to directly influence political life in the country."

Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia is a shadow of its former self and is not expected to win more than a handful of seats on Dec. 28. AFP

New World Trade Center to take 10 years, $12 billion to build

NEW YORK—Rebuilding New York's World Trade Center—destroyed in the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks—will take 10 years and cost some $12 billion, leaseholder Larry Silverstein said Wednesday.

He estimated the redevelopment effort would generate up to $18 billion in economic activity and provide 10,000 construction jobs for each year of the work.

Upon completion, the new trade center complex will have an estimated annual economic impact of $13.7 billion and generate 75,000 full-time jobs in lower Manhattan.

Silverstein said the cornerstone of the redeveloped site's centerpiece—a 1,776-foot high "Freedom Tower"—should be laid before next year's third anniversary of the attacks.

The tower—to replace the destroyed twin towers that had been a landmark of the Manhattan skyline—will be topped out at the end of 2008 and the last of four other office towers is slated for completion on 2015.

"What we have to accomplish, is to achieve nothing less than greatness," Silverstein told a luncheon hosted by the New York Building Congress.

"This is going to be the most spectacular commercial to live and work in once the World Trade Center has been rebuilt," he added.

The cost of the redevelopment will be met through $5 billion in federal aid and $7 billion in insurance payments, the property developer said, drawing a wry laugh from his audience.

Silverstein is currently locked in a bitter legal battle with the insurers, who say they will pay only half of his $7 billion claim.

The case, which will go to federal court in February, rests on whether the destruction of the twin towers by hijacked planes on Sept. 11 constituted one attack, as the insurers claim, or two separate attacks as Silverstein contends. AFP

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS
Only a few years ago, these two men were engaged in a deadly cat-and-mouse game. Now, Sen. Panfilo Lacson, former PNP chief, and Bulacan Liberal Roberto Pagdanganan are co-sponsors under K-Bloc, are allies and party-mates. And candidates, too. Lacson, who is running for President, rides the band of Liberal, who is running for Albay governor, during a mass catch-ceiling for LDP members in Legaspi City. (STORY ON PAGE A4)

MOVE over, "Dyip ni Erap." Here comes GMA who is explicitly pleased that the campaign donors and operators organizations, led by Orlando Mercado, have pledged to support her bid for a full six-year term in Malacañang. Behind the President is Energy Secretary Vicente Perez Jr.

'No admission, no amnesty'

(Story on page A4)

amnesty or in any Malacañang orchestrated settlement.

Not interested

Ousted President Joseph Estrada, who is facing plunder charges before the Sandiganbayan, is not interested in amnesty.

His lawyer Raymund Fortun told GMA7 last night that he would rather vacate and withdraw on behalf of the proposed amnesty because he was innocent of the crimes ascribed to him.

Jesus Dimaculangan disagrees about the possible inclusion of Estrada among those who would be granted amnesty.

"I doubt it, but I will have to study Estrada's case thoroughly," he remains said.

Political crimes

Senate President Franklin Drilon, on the other hand, said the proposed amnesty should cover only political crimes and not cases involving graft and corruption, thus disqualifying not only Estrada but also the Marcos boys and their cronies.

The Marcoses have pending cases before the Sandiganbayan involving the illegal wealth they allegedly amassed during the dictatorship.

Drilon defined political crimes as "those committed in the pursuit of a political objective."

"It would be improper to include crimes like plunder, which involves graft and corruption, in the proposed amnesty," he said in a statement.

Drilon said he was familiar with the legal principles involved in the grant of amnesty because he served twice as justice secretary and was once a member of the National Amnesty Commission.

In announcing her proposal, Ms Macapagal said a five-member Sandiganbayan amnesty commission would identify the persons, institutions and organizations to be granted amnesty. She said she did not give "specific names" because she would be "inadvertently unjust" to those who "deserve" and not "opportunist developers."

Political gimmick

But opposition Sen. Sergio Osmeña III said the proposed amnesty would not do the country any good and was a mere "political gimmick" of the Macapagal administration rather than a "national reconciliation effort."

"National reconciliation can only be based on justice, and those who have plundered the country must be made to pay," Osmeña told reporters.

He said the proposed amnesty bill would look like a "class legislation" because, he pointed out, the thieving rich would be given amnesty while those languishing in jail for relatively involving P1,000 or less would remain behind bars.

The kind of public policy he said, would be "unfair" to the poor and would make the people lose confidence in the justice system."

ESTRADA: Not interested

DRILON: Only political crimes

PIMENTEL: Extreme caution

SARMIENTO: Admit crimes first

"It will allow people who have committed crimes to get away with it, and that is clearly against it," Osmeña said, and blasted the proposed bill as a puzzling measure that seeks to grant an amnesty.

He said he was opposing the measure because bill "for the simple reason that those paying taxes are the poor through their salary deductions, while the rich who don't pay their taxes would just want to be granted amnesty."

Pimentel also urged Ms Macapagal to "define the parameters of the proposed settlement so that it will not be used as a basis for political gimmicks."

PR mileage

Teodoro Casiño, secretary general of the militant Bayan Alyansang Makabayan, and Mr Macapagal's planned general amnesty would be intended to generate public relations mileage in the run-up to the 2004 elections.

"There are existing amnesty programs, such as those [for] political prisoners. This plan offers nothing new and may just be meant to woo more votes and support from certain sectors," Casiño said the business is in to convene.

He also said Ms Macapagal's supposed attempts to be on good terms with the Marcos and Estrada camps were "tactics for stasis" given the pending criminal cases involving the two deposed leaders.

Bernardo Fegi, national chair of the militant Bukluran sa Manggagawang Pilipino, described the proposed general amnesty as "deplorable and highly inhumane."

"No person in his or her right mind would approve this disgraceful piece of legislation. This is a direct affront to the collective intelligence of the public," Ocampo said. *With a report from Norman Bordadora*

'Dyip ni Gloria'

(Story on page A1)

Macapagal-Arroyo's pure manifestation of support for her bid to win a full six-year term in May.

Throwing a party was an expensive affair these times in can be the highest office, we see no one here fitted for the job other than the President herself," the standfirst said. It was signed by the presidents of the Rice Consumers' group Consumia Mamamayan ng Pilipinas, Inc., Kontra "Sag" Bargas for Albofag, Alfon de Luna for PUJO-ACTO, Lando Marquez for Makati Jeepney Operators and Drivers Association and Roberto "Ka Obet" Martin for Pasang Masda.

In return, Ms Macapagal handed the transport leaders plaques of appreciation signed by Energy Secretary Vince Perez, who thanked them for supporting the President.

Lifestyle checks

The groups cited Ms Macapagal's lifestyle checks among governorial officials, saying they think these have been proven effective in stopping graft and corruption.

They also said Ms Macapagal has taken bold steps to neutralize the illegal drug menace in the country.

"Her leadership style and hands-on management in government affairs have allowed her to feel the pulse of the people and truly understand the needs and wishes of the citizenry, especially the transport sector," they said.

The transport leaders said Ms Macapagal espoused her support for the 'jeepney sector 'in an assertion some" in her State of the Nation Address and followed it up with concrete programs.

They said these included the creation of her administration's policies to ensure the pursuit of reform and economic growth.

After Montano read the conclusion on behalf of the group, a beaming Pimentel said, "Thank you, thank you."

When asked by Bitas reporters if the transport groups' support means they would not raise transport fares, the President replied: "I'm thankful to them."

Montano had initially said the Dyip-jeepney groups would not raise fare for as long as Ms Macapagal was president. But she later said the fares would stay for as long as the big oil companies continue to extend the P3.50-per liter discount for diesel-scapegoat jeepneys.

Solid support

Montano said the fare jeepney groups, including their families and friends, would be "solid" behind Ms Macapagal's candidacy.

"Our includes campaigning for her because we have let her support for us," she said in Pilipino. "She may not have received the support she has industry has wavered, but today we still feel her support. She may be poor, but we're human too, but we do understand that she's a good leader and should remain the President of the Philippines.

Marquez, a mechanical engineer who has pioneered air-conditioned jeepneys in Makati City and a few other routes in Metro Manila, said he was the one who designed the 'Jeepni-Sosy' in 1998.

"Sumisipot kami, hindi kami nahiyang ng isang 1% wala nagtatanong, he did not help us]," Marquez said.

Helped with loan

But he said Ms Macapagal helped them obtain a P23 million loan from the Pag-ibig fund for the development of the project, an original Filipino creation out of Nueva Ecija.

"With the President's help, there is nothing we cannot do," he said.

He said there are now 1,000 have placed orders for the sleek jeep, a 21-capacity unisex type vehicle.

He said Pagus New Century has ordered 4,000 units, Nissans 75 and Coaster 65.

"I do not know much now the fate of Mr. Mitsubishi, Hyundai, Mercedes and Isuzu Crosswind," he said.

Ms Macapagal inspected one such unit brought right outside the Palace Sunday, where she was passed for pictures with her running-mate Noli.

Solid support

In a telephone interview, Montano said there also enjoyed strong support from Gumaneng Pilipino, a network of Nueva governmental organizations that helped install Ms Macapagal into office.

But she said the jeepney group of officials should learn from the past. "Divided we fall, united we will win." Her group shudders at the thought of living under a government led by Poe, an actor, or Sen. Panfilo Lacson, according to Salazar.

Do a Laurel, GMA ally urges Roco

(Story on page A4)

dudoe plata to file his certificate of candidacy as Aquino's running mate. "What heroism. What statesmanship, if there never lawyers and accountants ha-, why not cook?" Baltazar said.

Pimentel, she recalled, never ventured ill feelings toward Aquino and Laurel even if he was made to give way to the latter.

"Pimentel had prepared a parade and caravan to go with him as he filed his candidacy before the Comelec. It was his birthday then," she recalled. On day 59, Pimentel was asked to give way to Laurel.

Baltazar noted that Pimentel even actively campaigned for the candidacy of Aquino and Laurel, who eventually lost to Marcos and former Tolentino in the 1986 election that was believed to have been rigged by the dictator. Marcos was ousted in a people power revolution.

"They [Pimentel and Laurel] have subsumed their own political ambitions for the good of the country. If they can do it before, Senator Roco should also consider doing the same now," Baltazar said.

Patriotic duty

But Roco, a former senator, said he was worried about a Pimentel-Poe-Jr. ticket should Pimentel call on the President to withdraw from the race, there said that even if he did down to be Mr Macapagal's running mate, his supporters would not vote for Ms Macapagal.

"But, her voters may transfer to me. [So,] she should withdraw. The patriotic duty is on her part," Roco said.

He reiterated that the "noise, if nonsense" was to charge the administration. "The only question is whether to replace it with," Roco added. Roco added that a campaign that can beat the Macapagal administration was that of Roco-FPJ.

Roco-FPJ

"NO. (Roco) can slide down as vice president as we can lose the candidacy[ourse]," he said.

He said the continuing "propaganda" that he should slide down for ex-Malacañang's "disservices."

Roco has chosen to file his certificate of candidacy on Dec. 30, Rizal Day. It is exactly a month after he proclaimed officially as Bonifacio Day.

Health secretary warns of renewed SARS threat

(Story on page A2)

Filipino victims were mostly health workers and domestic helpers abroad.

Search is on

From Taiwan, a task force official yet was said against a new SARS threat as officials revealed Thursday that the infected minister had last gone into strict home quarantine after losing ill, and that two possibly exposed co-workers were in the United States.

The search is also on for five foreigners who traveled on the same plane as the 46-year-old minister—a study by his last confirmed victims, Taiwanese Colonel Chen—more than a week ago.

So far, at least 98 people in Taiwan and Singapore have been quarantined, although none has developed SARS symptoms.

The developments came disturbing questions about decisions made by the man who, officials said, probably caught SARS while mishandling virus samples in his Taipei laboratory. Officials had said he was not wearing safety gear, such as a gown and gloves.

Although the scientist suspected that he might have been exposed to the highly contagious virus from a spilled test tube, he flew to Singapore on Dec. 7 to attend a conference, officials said.

Singapore has quarantined 78 people who had contact with the man, now isolated in the Tan Tock Seng Hospital in Taipei.

Separately in China, authorities have ordered all researchers to hand in SARS samples as a precaution against another lab accidents.

In Taiwan, 23 people are under quarantine. These include the man's family, people in a medical clinic he visited after getting sick, and some passengers on a plane he had flown in from Singapore.

Officials were looking for three Americans, a Japanese and a Singaporean who also flew with the scientist when he returned to Taipei from Singapore on Dec. 10.

Tracing his movements

When the scientist started panicking for SARS-by-Wednesday, officials said he had quarantined himself at home since developing a fever on the night of his return.

Officials had said the man did not show symptoms during his travels and probably did not infect anyone.

But on Thursday, Shih Wen-yi, a spokesperson for Taiwan's Government Information Office, said a news conference that the man did not stay at home the entire time after that.

This was how Shih recounted the man's movements:

The scientist spent the night at his work dormitory on Dec. 10. The next day, he took three buses to a suburban medical clinic in Taipei. He was then wearing a surgical mask.

After his checkup, the scientist went back home and waited five days before he went to a hospital—a violation of guidelines that require SARS researchers to seek immediate hospital care, according to Shih.

"Maybe our quarantine campaign was not enough," said Shih, who declined to discuss possible disciplinary action against the scientist.

The clinic's receptionist and doctor have been quarantined, along with five people ordered to the clinic's staff, Shih said, adding that there were no other patients in the clinic at the time.

Shih also said that two civil engineers who went to Singapore with the scientist traveled to the United States on Dec. 16.

The colleagues, who worked for the Ministry of Defense, have been ordered to return to Taiwan on Sunday, said Shih.

He refused to say where the men were in America but said the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention were monitoring the men, who had shown no SARS symptoms.

Mistakes

The Taiwanese are sure focusing on the scientist's mistakes.

Officials have said that he might have been infected by spilled virus samples while rushing to clean his laboratory, where he had been testing basic SARS cures, such as different medicines.

Shih declined to discuss the lab conditions, and a clause by the WHO that the scientist was not wearing protective gear. He said an investigative report would be released in three days.

Defense Minister Tang Yiau-ming defended the scientist, saying the latter had his wife, two adult daughters and father stay in separate homes after he got sick.

"Because he performed this dangerous work, he understands its dangers, so he exerted the utmost effort to prevent [misfortune]," Tang said.

But Tang acknowledged that mistakes were made.

"With people, you cannot avoid shortcomings and negligence," he said. "This is natural, this we have to improve. If there was no negligence, this case would not have happened, so I offer my sincere apologies to my compatriots." *Reports from Bloomberg's Alexander Lee and Agence France-Presse*

Debrah Lyn's pa won't be home for Christmas

Turn to page A4

SMOKE BELCHERS: The [illegible] will continue to be a sight on the road with government's decision to delay the implementation of the Clean Air Act.

Clear skies over RP to wait another 5 years

Turn to page B3

year using diesel, we have classified [illegible] for Port point," the DA compliance to the sulphur level of the industrial sector," Reyes said.

The three-day conference, dubbed "Better Air Quality" was organized by the Clean Air Initiative for Asian Cities, a project of the Asian Development Bank, World Bank and other development agencies.

But he said the energy department would continue to impose tax [illegible] to bill in line with the low-sulphur diesel rules as soon as possible.

The Philippines, an importer of crude and oil products, uses 130,000 to 135,000 barrels per day (bpd) of diesel, about 40 percent of its 300,000 to 350,000 bpd total oil product demand. Pilipinas Shell country chairman Edgar Chua said in October.

Early this year, head of Shell-related gasoline prices after the government imposed [illegible] automatic increase instead of 20 percent and lowered the [illegible] to 2 percent from 4 percent.

$68,000 deaths

According to other experts who spoke at the conference in Manila, pollution in the cities continues's booming cities is responsible for 500,000 deaths every year and the resulting loss of man-days absenced by health problems [illegible] $30 billion.

Bogota's capital, Bucharmanda, now runs a list of 27 Asian cities with the cleanest air, followed by New Delhi, according to a World Bank report presented at the conference. Jakarta and Chongqing, China's second largest city share third place.

Chris Hobson, serving World Bank director for the Philippines, said every 1,000 people in urban East Asia and the Pacific were losing more than 12 productive years due to disability caused by air pollution.

But the situation can improve—and is—through better air quality management by governments backed by greater public awareness of the problem.

Bangkok case

Hobson cited the case of Bangkok, where the visibility at the city's airport improved from about 1 km in 1996 to 9 km in 2000.

And, in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka, the phase-out of two-stroke engine or motorcycle taxis has slashed concentrations of fine airborne particulate matter by 43 percent, he said.

People are demanding cleaner air and there is a shift toward longer-term solutions. The private sector is getting involved and regional initiatives to control air quality are on the upswing, said Geert van der Linden, vice president of the Asian Development Bank.

"These trends, together with rapid development in technology which can substantially reduce pollution from both stationary and mobile sources, give us reason to be optimistic that air quality in Asia will improve in the years to come," he said.

Brian Sweet among investors promises the removal of the weekly oil-burning two-stroke engines, better management of high-polluting buses and trucks as well as maintenance of commercial vehicles and control of road dust.

Governments in Asia have adopted policy guidelines that focus on reducing pollution from vehicles, including motorcycles and three-wheel taxis which are common in the region. They cover emission standards, traffic planning and management, use of clean fuels, as well as inspections and maintenance. Report by Jerome Kuntes and AP

WHERE'S papa? Five-month-old Debrah Lyn has no idea what the fuss is all about but it looks almost certain her father Diosny won't be home for Christmas.

break Lyn in her arms.

"It's the yet to see our daughter. I hope the President would help us bring him back home soon. Our daughter would be christened on Sunday," she told the Inquirer.

Montelegre left the country on Jan. 17 for a one-year employment contract in Jeddah. He left the family barely four months in to his contract after the company who hired his services failed to pay his just wages.

"Like the other hunger strikers, my husband wants to come home badly," Anna added.

Former members of the Kenji 10 are involved in the hunger strike. They are engineer Dominic Yulong, Ernesto Villanueva, Perlito de Guzman, Jimmy de la Paz, Jose Danny Ladiana, Danny Morales, Paulino Ibañez, Robert Pineda, Jory Banes, Melvin Barcelona, Reynaldo Cayles, Julito Morjanio, Cesar Evangelista, Pepito Marquez, Jose Tejada and Mendiyapan.

"[We] would like to ask your help to repatriate us, if not, to expedite the transfer to our new sponsorship.... We expect you to negotiate for us with the Saudi top officials so that you would insist to this Kingdom during your visit," said Kenji 10 in a letter to Mr Macapagal's visit to the oil-rich nation.

"What is there to celebrate on this day of migrants when the people we recognize are treated like criminals and dirt in the host countries," said John Monterona, vice chairperson of the Migrante Sectoral Party.

According to Migrante, some 200 Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia are either stranded or unjustly languishing in jails. Leonard Abigail allows under Basic Law, runaways are forced into hiding both how the government and from their employers.

"What compassion does this government have when their proclaimed 'hugong kayan' [modern day heroes] remain in jails, cramped welfare centers and unscrupulous diplomatic posts," Monterona added.

'Bulacan's modern day hero'

Turn to page A4

Barnasan Church in Malolos City later on Saturday and, on Sunday morning, will be taken to the Libingan ng mga Bayani in Makati where he will be buried.

Philippine flags at the provincial capitol and municipal halls in Bulacan were flown at half-mast. Governors expressing condolences for Ople lined the highways leading to Hagonoy.

Bulakeños touched by the deeds of Ople started to flock to the Ople house in Barangay Santa Monica as soon as they heard the news of the secretary's death on Dec. 14.

Mila Lopez, an official from Barangay Sta. Cruz, said people crowded with the family by bringing flowers and lighting candles when they heard the news that Ople had died of heart attack in Toronto. "They were very sad. There was no one here that Among that not helped," she said.

Cheers

At the DFA building, Philippine Ambassador to Bangladesh Jose Ma. Ventura led the cheering as Ople's coffin was brought into the house. The autopsy left the 58% composed around 1 p.m., to the accompaniment of a slow march played by a military band.

DFAns five undersecretaries led employees in accepting Ople during [illegible] services at Malacañan Palace from 8 a.m. to noon.

THE HUMBLE, carrying the remains of the late Blas Ople, is covers with flowers by employees of the Department of Labor where he served for 18 years.

Undersecretary for administration Franklin Drilon called Ople "our father and our guide."

"While he was ambitious in his ideas, he remained grounded and centered ... He [left] not on his greatness but embraced his humanity. He was unconcerned with the trappings of power and influence, but instead focused on how they could be used to uplift the sustenance with whom he shared and cared for as much," he said.

DFA Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs Jose Brillantes, who said he has known Ople for 28 years, called him "an intellectual giant whose love of country, devotion to the national interest and passion for public service," [illegible] Montenegro, vice chairperson of the Migrante Sectoral Party.

According to Migrante, some 200 Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia are either stranded or unjustly languishing in jails. Leonard Abigail allows under Basic Law, runaways are forced into hiding both how the government and from their employers.

"What compassion does this government have when their proclaimed 'hugong kayan' [modern day heroes] remain in jails, cramped welfare centers and unscrupulous diplomatic posts," Monterona added.

Panoramic vision

He said Ople was one of the few gifted with self-starting, a Freudian expression which means a panoramic vision of the world and of life.

DFA Undersecretary for Policy Sonia Brady praised Ople's intelligentsia. She recalled that during the Asian-Japan summit in Tokyo, which they both attended last week, she asked why Ople agreed to the schedule of the Asian Foreign Ministers' summit in Jakarta on June 30 next year, which coincides with the date of the presidential inauguration.

Ople told her that he did not want to create additional problems for his friend, Indonesia foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda and would just make whatever adjustment was necessary to attend the meeting.

Absences

She also recounted how she once suggested to Ople that he stop smoking because he needed to preserve his health as the country still needed him. "The life expectancy of Filipinos today is 68 years, so at my age, every day I live is already a bonus," was Ople's reply.

International Labor Organization acting-general director Werner Bertzel Blank, Asian Deputy Secretary General Wilfredo Villamentes, presidential adviser on international concern Rosario Robert Ramirez, and Speaker Jose de Venecia also eulogized Ople.

DFA deputies presented a [illegible] presentation featuring clips and homage of Ople dealing with the press.

RTN Archbishop Gaviola, who read the eulogy, said: "The long list of his achievements are there for the books. But the memories are for keeps. Oftentimes, we admire officials we serve for their wit, intelligence, charisma, competence and professionalism."

At the end of the service, Archbishop Antonio Franco, dean of the diplomatic corps, gave a brief message and Freddie Aguilar sang the person's song "Bayan Ko."

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METRO
Editor Abelardo S. Ulanday

TO THE RESCUE
A traffic enforcer from the Land Transportation Office pushes a car that got stalled along the President Diosdado Macapagal Boulevard to get it out of the way of other vehicles. (AP PHOTO)

MIDNIGHT MASS VIOLENCE

Man stabbed to death; 7 hurt in pillbox blast

By Edwin Tandoc Jr.

WHAT was supposed to be a solemn Simbang Gabi mass yesterday morning turned into chaos when a pillbox exploded just a few meters away from the San Roque Cathedral in Caloocan City.

The explosion, which happened in the middle of the priest's homily, wounded seven people.

In Valenzuela City, policemen were nowhere to sight when a 17-year-old man was stabbed to death shortly after the 12:00 a.m. celebration.

Police officials had earlier announced that journeys would be displaced to secure the churches.

But a church volunteer at the San Roque Cathedral said that the 2 or 3 policemen assigned to their church could not possibly search over the thousands of people that attend mass every morning.

The volunteer also told the Inquirer that most of the early morning church-goers are "thrill-seeking" teenagers.

At 5:30 a.m. yesterday, the San Roque Cathedral at the corner of A. Mabini Street and 10th Avenue was rocked by an explosion.

Investigators said Homer Miranda, 17, tossed a pillbox at a group of teenagers at the cathedral's gate. Elle Otone, James Olivero, Raymund Manzanilla, Christian Arroyo, Allan Wade, Jaldy Enriquez and Edwin Bernal were wounded in the blast and were taken to the hospital in Caloocan.

Barangay security men and angry church-goers ran after the suspect and caught him.

At about the same time, Edmon Pascuantos, 17, had just gone out of the Our Lady of Mercy Church in Valenzuela and was now walking home with his friends when about seven teenagers appeared and began hurling stones.

The attackers chased and cornered Pascuantos when he tried to run away, and PO2 Richard Bautista.

One man, identified only as Andong, pulled out a knife and stabbed Pascuantos five times.

Employees picket Ever supermarket

By Edwin Tandoc, Jr.

EMPLOYEES of Ever Emporium Supermarket in Caloocan City yesterday refused to report for work and instead formed a picket outside the store yesterday.

Rhinnerey Bienaventurado, Ever's vice president Perd Tarzo told the Inquirer yesterday that they were protesting the lay off of 45 fellow employees.

The employees, most of whom had been with the company for more than 20 years, were laid off after the Ever Department Store in Recto closed down, Tarzo added.

Tarzo said the lay off violated the Collective Bargaining Agreement, which stated that the employees should have been absorbed by the other branches of the department store chain.

But the company chose to lay the workers off.

The 37 employees at the Caloocan City branch started their picket on Wednesday noon.

They brought mats which indicated that they intend to stay outside the building until the issue is resolved.

The bayanis called the company during yesterday to get their comment, but was told the official authorized to grant an interview was in a closed door meeting.

2 die, cop hurt as rash of crime hits Metro streets

By Lucila Salaverria

A "DOWNED" tourist and a security guard were shot dead while an off-duty policeman was seriously wounded in three robbery incidents that hit the metropolis.

In Manila, Taiwanese Wen Hua Yang, 33, was shot dead when three men attempted a holdup inside a property along M.H. del Pilar Street at 6:45 a.m. yesterday.

The killing of Wen happened as Western Police District chief Pedro Bulaong boasted of the effectivity of his deployment of "saturation" or search agents to fight crime.

Hours earlier, at 9:15 p.m. Wednesday, a lone gunman shot security guard Eraño Bringas in the head during a heist at the Sto. Tomas Drug Store on North Bay Boulevard South in Navotas.

An identical lone-man crime inside a bus along Edsa in Makati City, a knife-wielding man stabbed SPO3 Oscarsalt Defensor, 44, detailed in Pasay City.

The suspect ran away after the hapless with the victim's coin gun when the latter resisted.

Defensor, who was stabbed eight times, was rushed to a nearby hospital.

Meanwhile, police investigators are looking at a possible inside job after P300,000 was stolen from illegal tickets, a shoe design artist, of the Cosmo Sports Co. in Barangay Pasing.

Rich Edson Rendoy Jr., Margaux Ortiz and Luige del Puerto

QC roads closed as giant networks hold parties

ALL ROADS leading to the offices of ABS-CBN and GMA 7 are expected to experience heavy traffic today as the two giant television networks hold their annual Christmas party from noon to 11 p.m. the next day.

Lopez Street (from Tomas Morato Extension to Mother Ignacia St.) and 7 Sto. Tomas Extension in Mother Ignacia will be closed, according to Assistant City Administrator for Internal Affairs and Department of Public Order and Safety chief Manuel Bautista.

Also, a portion of Bulacan St. (from St. Rosa to Santa Clara Sts.) will be closed today at noon to 6 a.m. the following day to give way for the "Pasabuan sa Bulacan."

Motorists are advised to avoid these areas.

Bautista has also ordered the deployment of DPOS personnel to handle traffic in the affected areas.

MetroBriefs

No turnover

THE TWO Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency agents accused of shooting to death agent of the National Bureau of Investigation have been placed in the custody of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group, contrary to claims of PDEA officials, in a statement, an NBI official said that they had not heard the DEA) that the two PDEA agents charged with the shooting of NBI Agent Manuel Mallanao were never turned over to the police group. The PDEA man are PO2 Norman Jones Hilario and PO3 Sherwin Bulan. It mentioned, Senior Supt. Rolando Mallanao, regional director of the PDEA's Metro Manila Regional Office was also charged with frustrated murder and filed before the justice department. Lucila Salaverria

Raped in QC

PETTY enema, a security guard and resident of Pagadian, Nueva, Fairview, Quezon City, yesterday was arrested for allegedly raping his sister-in-law in their house. The 26-year-old victim, who lives in the same joint with the police, claimed that Petchie had been threatened to her life if she reported the incident to the authorities.

Tina Santos

Lamp posts anyone?

SEVEN Aeons and another man on Wednesday night were caught red-handed by a policeman while they had just taken apart at least one of 9 Old Iron and Bronze Lamp Posts in Sta. Cruz, Manila. Senior Supt. Security Inspector Rodolfo Magno identified the two men and caught Rivera, 29, alleged member of the Sigue-Sigue Sputnik gang, on Gen. M. Roxas Avenue. The other man managed to elude arrest. The seemingly well-dressed of the aluminum and fiberglass lamp-post, is city government property. They also seized the tools which the suspects used in committing the crime terms. Tonia Bolanos

Boy dies in fire

DAVID L. Jones Poca, 7, died in a fire in Holland City yesterday morning. Firefighters pulled out the body of Poca from the ruins of his family residence in Sitio Tuculan, Barangay Mandaluyan. Old Antonio Cruz said the mother, Diana, 31, left the two youngsters the second floor of their house at around 9 a.m. to buy food. Cruz said the fire must have started when the victim left open old electric plug with a candle inside the house. The candle could have sparked the fire, Cruz said.

Lolgo del Puerto

Man stabs stepdad

ROBERTO Evidente, 48, yesterday was said to be in stable when he tried to hurt his wife inside their house in Manila. His stepson, Carlo Rivera, 27, stepped in when he spotting a knife in his dad's mother said. When Evidente, a resident of Pasola Compound, Tondo, Manila, arrived home around 5:30 a.m. he was drunk and tried to pick a fight with his wife. Jerry of his household, Lydia Lopez Rivera said. Evidente's wife, Rivera, tried to pacify her husband, but the man went on and more allegedly tried to attack her. When Rivera saw that his mother was about to get beaten up, he grabbed a knife and stabbed Evidente several times. Lolita Salaverria

In Marikina, lawmen now smell the Christmas air

A police officer took a deep breath and smiled. "Now, it really smells like Christmas," he then sighed.

Indeed, barmen at police headquarters encouraged among some lines for pan masks to help them survive the stench of a boiling spice tank set on six burners.

They give brave gift instead.

The city sent a spice tank overseas, which pumped out the first wedding gas.

Later, city cook police visitors and asked the spice tank owner to provide fewer tanks.

For weeks, the policemen and the inmates in the city police headquarters complained of the foul smell that circulated from the tank.

Recently, the cops were singing Christmas carols in City Hall and saying, "Thank you... Thank you... Ang baho! Thank you!"

Jaime Ari Flores

INQUIRER

OPINION

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Deep in debt

EDITORIAL

IT COULD be because it is the political season. But more likely it is because the problem has reached critical proportions that economists have started to raise the alarm about the government's perennial budget deficit and the country's mounting debt.

Days after he resigned as finance secretary, Jose Isidro Camacho declared the Philippines was in a "fiscal crisis."

The country's high level of debt could not be sustained, he said, and the resulting loss of confidence in the government's ability to manage its finances has raised the cost of borrowings. The problem, he said, lay basically in the government's failure to implement revenue reforms, with Congress being too slow in passing needed legislation such as the indexation of beer and tobacco taxes and the transformation of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. "Right now, the government doesn't have the means to deal with the present problem," he concluded.

The magnitude of the problem was graphically described earlier by Sen. Ralph Recto. As of August this year, the debt of the national government alone stood at P1.258 *trillion*. And that debt is increasing tremendously as the government continues to operate on a deficit. Since the previous year, Recto said, that debt has been growing at the rate of P94.2 *billion* an hour or almost P1.3 billion a day. "While we are embroiled in bickering, while our attention is grabbed by political posturing, the debt meter, like a time bomb, ticks away," he warned.

One way to build down the deficit and keep the debt from mounting is to raise more. But as Camacho and other economists have noted, Congress is not quick to oblige. Not in an election year, and not especially if the reform measure will hurt the interests of some generous campaign donors.

Economic Planning Secretary Romulo Neri was more direct and specific in blaming Congress and special interest groups for the government's inability to deal with the debt problem. He said big tobacco and alcohol interests made politicians afraid to push for tax legislation that would help narrow the budget deficit. "It is politics that is really bringing us down," he said. "The two most powerful vested interests are alleviated and the House committee on ways and means has shown that it cannot go against these interests."

The indexation of the so-called "sin taxes" which would raise prices of cigarettes and alcoholic beverages every two years is expected to yield P7 billion. But Neri said this is being opposed by a well-entrenched oligarchy that can influence the outcome of elections. These oligarchs balance the campaign of some politicians to win favors and economic advantages, and these politicians return the favor by writing or enacted reform measures affecting adversely their patrons' interests, completing a "vicious cycle of crony capitalism."

Neri's criticisms of Congress prompted one congressman to remark the irony by pointing out that Neri, as chief of the Congressional Planning and Budget Office, played a key role in persuading Congress to drop the ad valorem tax on tobacco and alcohol products and shift to a specific tax in 1996. True. But at least Neri is willing to rectify his mistake, after realizing it, while lawmakers choose to stubbornly pursue in their error—and not exactly for very honest reasons.

Finger-pointing, however, is not going to make a dent on the country's huge debt or narrow the deficit, which is expected to reach P300 billion this year. Clearly there is need for reforms in the systems of taxation and the agencies charged with revenue collection. The measures pending before Congress should help bring revenues a little closer to expenditures. But as the estimated additional revenues would show, even the enactment of all these measures would not keep the country's debts from piling up to new highs.

It's time the government considered more radical steps, like seeking debt relief. Next year the government will have to set aside P542.2 billion for debt repayment. That's more than half of the national government's budget, and that's money taken away not only from national security and social services but also from education, infrastructure development and other investments that increase the country's productivity. By now, the experiences of countries like Argentina must have taught international financial institutions that squeezing a heavily indebted country doesn't improve its capacity to pay but drives it to bankruptcy.

Amnesty will prove that crime does pay

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

EJ seeks President Macapagal-Arroyo's other running mates' opposing local advice. Sorry thing that she also must appear to be politicking in a desperate attempt to put up some formidable ticket in next year's elections. The proposal to give amnesty to all those facing charges for all crimes against the government is simply stupid. The vaccine is "national unity," which on the surface seems all right, and although she did not mention them, the beneficiaries will include the Marcoses and Ong. The real reason is obvious: to get the votes of their still-sizable followers.

Considering the big numbers the common people disenchanted with the present government—besides the Marcoses and Ongs and their supporters, they include the communist rebels, the Muslim secessionists, the military boys who—you can see my spring chicken memory may spell the difference between winning and losing in the coming elections.

It seems like a shrewd move, but it is never declared unconstitutional and shameless one. So it would immediately weaken the government. It would more further the people's respect for our laws. It would show that one can violate our laws with impunity because when the elections come around, the government will forgive him anyway. Then, why should we obey the laws when the duly constituted governments anytime became a confrontation administration can always give them amnesty in exchange for votes any way, it would show very clearly that crime pays.

Amnesty for the Muslim and communist rebels may be understandable, for their crimes are political (and a succession of administrations, using enormous amounts of military hardware and even foreign aid, can't defeat them anyway), but forgiveness for grafters and plunderers and military adventurers who are responsible for the government is shameless warfaring. It is unnecessary or bribery.

The crimes of graft and treason should be exempted from an amnesty. For if Congress were to pass the general amnesty bill that the Palace would certainly support because the elections are only a few months away!—and it is likely that Congress will pass it because many of its members are running for higher offices—the likes of Imelda Marcos and her cronies will run laughing all the way to the banks and other international and local banks and hundreds of millions or all of us shall vanish.

"To err is human, to forgive divine" may be a nice aphorism to hear, but graft is not simple error, it is intentional; it has malicious intent. Graft is an offense from which even no premeditated murder is different from accidental homicide.

But the GMA-sponsored amnesty bill will not apply. Her only motive in this case is to prevent Imelda Marcos from running in the 2004 elections. Imelda is already endorsing his cousin in Bohol contender in the making when she is in the same time preparing in Congress to hanger gadfreed decomposed by Senator President Pidel V. Ramos and Speaker Jose de Venecia (whose achievement record against graft are far from exemplary)—the Pres-ident may win Villanueva to plead with him not to run for president. If the issue is Lost reconciliation allegedly but a running like of the million and GMA's mistake is Senator Juan Ponce Enrile, the term Brother Eddie said corruption is getting out of control and his purpose in running is to "dramatically reduce it." So and his Rods were a tool, spiritual, moral movement in the country? How how can GMA do that if she would pardon grafters?

So, the amnesty play won't work. It is too transparent; the motive is too obvious if it was ever having. It's again.

* * *

Speaking of opposition candidates, Fernando Poe Jr. will formally accept this Monday the nomination for him to be the presidential standard-bearer of the United Opposition. What happens to Sen. Panfilo Lacson? The rumor is that he would go back to the Senate, he has three more years to serve in it. Certainly it is not that he would run for vice president, though a Poe-Lacson combination may not be a bad compromise.

FPJ's most likely running mate—whom he is expected to also identify this Monday—is Sen. Loren Legarda. A good choice. Legarda is popular (she is a former topnotcher), just like GMA but without the latter's baggage), is good-looking, very articulate, should have the support of the Lopezes' MTV-CBN, should narrow the women votes represented to go to ERAP and Roco, and the only pro-environment presidential candidate, which should attract the support of the environmental NGOs and the fishermen and farmer organizations.

If Lacson accepts a supporting role, that would also be a possible choice. Running on running will divide the opposition vote and lead to the victory of GMA. In which case, his prosecution will continue. On the other hand, if he helps FPJ win, the new administration will owe him an obligation and Lacson can have a breathing spell. He is still young and there are many more chances to be president. If he performs outstandingly in the remainder of his term in the Senate, running in the next presidential season may be a breeze.

* * *

ESPEJO NOTES: Guess at Monday's Legislan as Manila Bonay will be sorry other than MV—Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr., for those not yet in the know. All the presidential candidates will comply via campaign platforms PRESDUMO.

Madness

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

ONE is constrained to the Messiah. This is what he wrote in the box that said, "Deception," when he filed his presidential candidacy last Monday with the Commission on Elections. He signed his name as S.N.H., though he was known by other names, depending on his mood. Emanuel on earth. They include Sinalumuan Ind. Ismaelitapolis Mamamalunan. I hope I did not misspell it. I also hope it is the real name of the real, and Ace Diamond, when he appears as entertainer in chief on Earth, sure he had to make do.

The name clue is related to George Bush, the (one) most powerful man on earth whose name is more Bush. Whether he affirms or confirms antipathy is no less dear. The word Comelec officials did not engaged to Bush at one point. The wrong clown Legarda to be her running mate. Scroll this writing. Legarda hadn't yet copied to her invitation.

Another has a plan to abolish poverty which is startling in its simplicity. Gaman Velasquez intends to give the unemployed P1 million each in pension, and the employed P1 million each in bonus—each year. His slogan sign—elections are an exercise in discerning slogan signs, except the raised middle finger—is the joined thumb and forefinger and the three remaining fingers raised to signify money for me and for me.

Doubtless, they will end up only handing the list of candidates for disqualification. The Comelec does that routinely before elections, weeding out the nuisance candidates from the serious ones. Barely before the last elections in 2001, the Comelec barred a former painter, a jobless man, a musician and a mattress businessman, among others, from running for presidency. The former painter and jobless man thought their chosen vocations were just as good as others'. The musician wanted to spread music as a way of reconciling people and spreading peace and prosperity in the country. The businessman believed, like the Messiah above, he was sent by God to assist Christians and Muslims.

They did not have the financial and legal means to challenge the constitutionality of their ouster, and neither will their counterparts now. But we do have the intellectual and moral means to challenge the logic of it. The criteria for legitimate candidates include having the financial means to run a campaign and having the credibility for it. The first is thoroughly questionable. As the very least, why should poverty be an obstacle to becoming president? As the very least, why should wealth qualify as a good credential?

There are many more cases of extravagant spending, but they are never disbarred or outlawed. No one has been prosecuted and jailed for violating electoral rules, except Mark Jimenez, and it seems to be the country it was in the Unitel hours. Despite the fact that Jimenez got his immigration visa by buying votes to the elections in Manila. He spent a fortune to get us true the American's favorite beast, and only to reallocate several tens from it. Which is some—people running for presidents with or with no money?

But quite incidentally, one of the funniest things I ever saw an item in which a couple of months ago that said the authorities confiscated the cash of bank withdrawers on elections dreaming night. The police suspected these depositors were doing so to raise funds for their impending campaigns. What made it strangely funny—the kind where it hurts to laugh—was that it made perfect sense in this country we see certainly found it odd. No one found it odd, if the deposits was true, when kind of public officials the bank robbers would make. You spend the fruits of a bank heist to campaign, you expect to profit more when you win. Clearly, robbing the country is more lucrative than robbing a bank.

As to merit, which is what credibility really means in this case, asking the Comelec to rule on who are wise and who are dead to like asking the blind to lead the blind. Ask yourself if there is a yearning vote in this. The Comelec's rules on holding for nuisance candidates are that the latter should have an outstanding record over three years and his machinists should comply with a 90 accuracy rate. Both would disqualify even the Messiah as a candidate in that case, just because he was in the movies for only

How to tell the world of Saddam's capture

NEWS ANALYSIS

Jim Mannion

WASHINGTON—Long before Saddam Hussein's humiliating capture, US officials had spent nine months debating through how they would break the news to the world. Whether Saddam was taken dead or alive, the development was not to have huge implications.

But no one could have anticipated how Iraq's ex-dictator was finally picked up by the US troops who found him in a hole in his personal, bunker-like complex, bewhiskered, tired and with no fight left in him.

Nor could they have asked for Saddam to give out to the world a more devastating image of antidemocratic behavior, as his three decades as one of the world's most feared men was finally brought to a close.

"In the last analysis he seemed not terribly brave," said US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in a televised interview late Sunday. Rumsfeld said Saddam had put up no resistance to being taken alive "or kill who if he could not let others live."

"But it was something like the fury on the pained were diminished, and we were prepared for a riskier way and had thought through what might be the appropriate circumstances in each of those," Rumsfeld added.

Pentagon officials said they had worked up several public affairs plans for a range of scenarios, recognizing that whenever and Saddam met would be of extraordinary importance.

The planning included the possibility that one shred of video would be satisfied, and what, when, by whom and in what sequence the news would be released to the media, according to Pentagon officials.

The New York Times reported that President George W. Bush approved a plan, drawn up by the press officers at the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad and nicknamed "IRON," for "High-Value Target 1" to ensure the top official, speaking on conditions of anonymity, solidified the notion of a freely exchanged "playbook" that would stop maximum mileage from the capture in the Arab world, and elsewhere.

"That gives us a degree of sophistication that we've mastered," he said.

Nevertheless, US and military officials interviewed later said the overriding hope and the longin Arab public that Saddam had been captured amid the video images of him in custody.

"Images need to be much more important in the Arab world. They're much more literal than here," the official said.

When Saddam's sons Uday and Qusay were killed July 22 in a shootout with US troops, widespread public skepticism in Iraq forced multiple officials in Baghdad to show the press their mangled corpses with gruesomely reconstructed faces.

Images of Saddam were ordered that showed him being treated in a professional manner in keeping with Islamic Conventions' rules on the treatment of prisoners of war, the official said.

"We just wanted to show photographs that were humiliating, hurting or that had him up to public ridicule," he said.

The images...a bearded Saddam being checked for head lice and having his mouth examined by a military doctor—were purposefully nondescript, minimizing the pleasure of a tyrant that is steeped in the Ordinary's description of his capture.

The picture was completed with a Baghdad press conference on Sunday in which an exposition of cheers, applause and Iraqi reporters shouting "Death to Saddam!" greeted the announcement of the former Iraqi president's capture.

Some 19 hours had elapsed between the time US troops seized him at a farm south of Tikrit on Saturday night local time and the seven sombre men, giving officials the luxury of having some time to refine their plans.

"It's a basic issue of public affairs," said the senior defense official. "It has to do with speed versus accuracy and having the appropriate balance." A major concern was making sure the prisoner was actually Saddam and not one of his doubles.

Meanwhile, a small circle of aides or 'shooting ers were arrested.

Both hotbed of Saddam's capture at around 1:15 p.m. (0315 GMT) Saturday in a telephone call from Rumsfeld, who cautioned the president that first reports were often unreliable.

Top officials on the defense floor inside the rounds of Washington Christmas parties as if nothing was up.

NBC television anchor Tim Russert recounted that he ran into CIA director George Tenet as a party and that he had informed the night before that Saddam had been captured.

"Happy holidays, Tim," Tenet responded, by Russert's account.

Shortly after 5 a.m. (1000 GMT) Sunday, the president received confirmation from National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice that they in fact had Saddam in custody.

But none of the captors had leaked a few minutes earlier. The Iranian news agency IRNA was the first to report it, citing Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani's spokesman.

The look easier not long after members of the Iraqi Governing Council were taken to see Saddam as part of the process of identifying him and verifying Iraq authorities.

AFP

Praying

"DON'T ever give up. Pray it works."

This message is displayed prominently on the side of a pedestrian overpass somewhere along Commonwealth Avenue in Quezon City. It makes you think initially of the official who had it painted there, don't you agree? What a comforting thought that he or she did not succumb to the temptation of arrogating who was responsible for warning the overpass so that his or her name would be permanently immortalized and, once-in-a-lifetime time.

As a matter, we will find the warning more appropriate and you had better heed it—when your bilateral, particularly important, but drivers until 2004 rolls around.

Mark your path as they may wherever they please to land and animal passengers. Don't start thinking your fears unreasonably or shouting at them with "Stay, stop, leaving or you go Kamakazi or maybe up yonder to my dog, dummy, don't be your passengers off in the air, you're not the helicopter!" Just keep your cool and say nothing the deadline lightning to strike them tall of attack are finds by the way and bad for your blood pressure, heartbeat.

Instead, direct your thoughts heavenward like a praying, silent unanswered and helpless, human being. Try praying for those annoying travelers, and don't get your words while doing so. Remember, the creation pandemonium...for the charitable and kind. Maybe you can implore the Lord to "relieve these dangerous drivers; may they learn to enjoy kind journeys."

If you recall your catechism, this can have the former and the latter kind from one converted to Christianity and eventually became St. Paul. It is said that Stephen, a devoted Christian lover, was responsible for this dramatic conversion. As he was being stoned and lay dying at the feet of Saul, Stephen prayed fervently, "Lord, do not hold this act against them!" (meaning his executioners, principally Saul who was overseeing their lapidating). Saul, as we know, got the message and began to transform himself to God and confessors) into with the plaintive question, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" And three-quarters hundred 180 degrees converted, the rest, as they say, is history.

I mean nothing, though, that where I side is true as a property driven by a maniacal, hyper-caffeinated, speed-addicted driver who I am preaching here. Well, unless you consider the following thoughts as prayerful, "Drive-by! Mother-mary-ing bless-ing saving-bless-ing driver on its Day-God! (with the MMBS people would appreciate this distinction driver)!"

Why is it that we tend to pray only in times of distress and need? Some of the most beautiful words in the Bible are of forewarn and I finally retrieved bits and fragments of "Our Father" latin, without finishing the prayer), as we sought protection under our sides and desks. The best of words received ings crashing over our heads was an overpowering that we accompanied by our voices—but begging those ears forgiveness for our sins.

In my experience, repentive positive prayers are always answered. Early in my marriage, I prayed daily for a baby and did not give up until I got one, seven and a half years later. The Divine Chef must have regarded me as a hopeless pastry-lover and sensitive of a "baby" for after my first, she answered me six more pregnancies—in rapid succession no! Unfortunately, I can lose all those fond recollections. Still, I am thankful for the times who have comforted.

To be sure, prayer touches some on his pervasive and humble. Even in times of triumph and and thanks due, we should not regress a quick response to our petitions. It pays to be make-sir (persistent).

It helps too if you offer some services or sacrifices to strengthen your plea, such as "I'll give up the fortyeight hundred pesos I spend on Bavarian sausages every payday." You seems for mercedes-silver all.

Like most kids, I learned my first prayers from my deeply religious mother. Every night after dinner, she would gather the entire family (which included an assortment of elderly aunts, cousins and house helpers) before the holy images in our living room. We had to recite the rosary (in my case, in order to participate in the group devotions). While she led the prayers in a mixture of Spanish and Latin, my siblings, cousins, and I would respond in English or Pampango. Our boundless, a Bicolano, found it inconvenient to reply to the entreaties in any language but his own native tongue. Thus, in Pampango and dialects, we were sure that the almighty understood. I imagined him mumbling indignantly as someone struggled with his "Sanctus"—"Nung mudsi'y Dios ka Pan-ti-Pi."

Nothing in our prayers, our names would be barely audible, for a few would already be nodding drowsily. To join us back to reality, my mother would pinch an arm here or pull a sleeve there. Suddenly someone, enormously so, seemed from a lingering repose, would answer with renewed energy. "Pray for us," although we were sure we were the closest things to angels in our household, we were not certain and sometimes we made our voices go to the bathroom just so we could let loose a solemn of forbidden laughter.

Sometimes it was my mother herself who was responsible for the interruptions. Carrying through her "Dios ni salve," she would turn to the heavenly and say, "Bye, go and check whether the door is closed and locked." Or "Don't you even smell the food on the stove?" On those days about half a dozen can't from the neighborhood were in the habit of stealing into our home and raiding our kitchen.) I do not know why we kids found such interruptions extremely funny, and we were always ready to collapse again in laughter, if not for the wrath look of our elders.

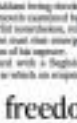
These days, the widely diverse work and social schedules of my family make it difficult for us to pray together. But in our individual ways, wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we invoke Divine Providence, Heavenly Intervention.

I am sure the Lord listens to everybody's prayers, whether they are conventional or "homemade," serving as they are to exacerbate fervent and sincerity. While praying for outsiders, we are told to pray for our tormentors as well. Pope St. Gregory I said, "He ensures his prayers to be of more avail to himself, who also prays for his enemies."

This morning, when I looked, the sign on the pedestrian overpass that I mentioned at the beginning of this piece had been partly hidden by a banner announcing an obstacy procession to an equally obscure destination. So I think it regardless now to pray for that city official in our district, "Lord, would that the thoughtless councilor move his banner some place else where it won't cover the complete for your faithful people to see ever give up, but to pray!" Amen.

Step Lupus-Temple is retired from the government service. As she celebrates to age, she gratitudes more and more toward the church.

Senators and the freedom to fly



AT LARGE

Nina Jimenez-David

REGENCY regimes never rest in the media on the moment of Senators Tito Sotto and Johnny Ancog into of the vote since they find themselves on the same side of an issue) that "Independents and Democratic Secretary Leandro Mendoza file to accuse Alberto Lim from the Club between the Bar Association Lim of "being a backer of foreign airlines and investors.

The senators have even threatened to hold the passage of the BOTC's budget unless Mendoza gave in to their demand for Lim's head.

Who is this Mendoza, and why would he commit the ire of senators on both sides of the political determination?

Lim is better known in civil society circles as "Boots" Lim, a businessman involved in some late 80 Nido resorts, the last I heard, who was also a member of the Philippine Bar Association and served as an adviser to Alma Bengzon during the bases negotiations. It was during this time that Lim picked his inside as a justice, to the point that he was viewed as the primary "source of the Bar" on matters relating to the bases.

Which is why it's quite an irony that Lim should now be accused of selling out Philippine interests in favor of foreign governments and airlines in his role as president of the four-man Club board.

In an open letter to Mendoza, Lim exercises every pain in the senators' animosity:

"They claim my being a founding member of the Freedom to Fly Coalition (sinc), an advocacy group pushing for the liberalization of our country's civil aviation (sinc), makes me an agent of foreign airlines. They claim that because certain other members of the coalition were hired by a USAID-funded group called Right Issues, which has engaged Filipina Ph.D.s to teach the Filipino people to do the research work behind our reform legislation in the Senate, I am also in their pocket. I have never been hired by Right Issues since I ever been on their roster of consultants."

It Will Lower. Lim says that it is really Philippine interests that have been working against the scheme for the "other Last Mile" because it has been unhappy on say the least.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE A16)

with Lim's resistance to moving the PAL line in their GSB discussions and decisions. "In spite of being a minority of one," writes Lim, "I have been able to argue my case such that the majority are united to vote according to the way PAL senses them to on certain critical issues."

Lim asserts that the country's national interest is being sacrificed to save what he calls a "dying airline." "PAL is technically bankrupt as it carries [more than] P38 billion [as of 2003] in unremunerated foreign exchange losses as an asset in its books," he claims. "By 2005, international accounting standards will force PAL to write this down. Will Lucio Tan come up with $500 million to save PAL?"

While PAL continues to enjoy preferential treatment from aviation authorities and policymakers, the rest of the airlines and users in the country, and the entire country suffers, Lim declares. "Tourism cannot grow because PAL does not want our country's frequencies to grow since it cannot expand its fleet accordingly because its balance sheet cannot support the expansion. Its fare structure is not competitive. Overseas carriers which started only in 1997 has already overtaken us. Other Filipino airlines (like Cebu Pacific) cannot grow. Our OFW's have had to wait three months to get a date to check overseas because the country's quota of charter is not enough cargo capacity in the bellies of our passenger aircraft. And for what do we exchange these? To create 6,000 jobs at PAL? So, to save the $500 million investment in PAL of Lucio Tan, one of the richest men in the country?"

(CONTINUED ON PAGE A16)

Miscommunication in art

LOOKING BACK

Ambeth R. Ocampo

Contrary to popular belief, St. Nicholas, the original Santa Claus, is not the home of Tabasinos, but Nicholas of Bari. As the patron of children and sailors, he was popular in the Netherlands and the Netherlands to give presents to children in his name at Christmas. The custom crossed the Atlantic into the United States brought by Dutch Protestants (not Catholics) to New Amsterdam (later called New York), where the name of Santa Nicholas was Americanized to Santa Claus and later to Santa Claus. So the 4th century miracle working Bishop of Bari now has modern names in the 19th century and transformed into the fat bearded man in a red suit and cap who travels in a flying sled pulled by reindeers. Even his residence moved from the East to the North Pole.

His Basilica de Tolentino (1245-1951) transferred to many places in the Philippines, administered by dugongsimans and Recoletos, sometimes his head mistakenly as his. If the story is true his mother was pregnant for seven years as a pilgrimage to the shrine of Nicholas of Bari and was blessed with a son they named Nicholas. The saint became famous as benefactor and spent time in a place called Tolentino, hence Nicholas de Tolentino. He was canonized a saint in 1446 and died in 1305 at the age of 78.

In his old age, San Nicolas continued to live and donate from more even if he was ill. He was advised to use a bit more or perhaps to take some more, but the saint felt this was going in to the wrong of his body and refused. It is said that the Virgin Mary appeared to him in a vision and told him to take some bread dipped in water so he would regain his health. He obeyed and got well, so he started doing this to all sick people to use this dipped in water thus, originated the custom of blessing St. Nicholas' bread on his feast and distributing this to the sick. In the Philippines, more specifically in Pampanga and adjoining areas, the bread is sometimes cooked in eggs and golden, a custom found in half shaped and has the image of the saint embossed on it.

The Pan de San Nicolas or Pancidlan de San Nicolas or plain Pancidlan shows the saint standing with a bishop's crozier and holding three loaves of bread on his left arm symbolizing the Holy Trinity. The legend is that during the famine the saint continued to feed and donate from one of the trees offered on his left arm symbolizing all he received. Naturally, he refused as his supply never ran out. Because of this generosity and unselfishness, he was canonized a saint. Another legend is that a partridge flew between the Philippines through the mysterious Christmas song, "Partridge in a pear tree." This little bird is very popularly known under the Filipino name "pugo." Nicholas rescued bird from the hands of a saint who snatched it and brought it back to life.

So this bird flew away to be captured and eaten another day but the saint has since been depicted on art and in those cookies holding a bird on a plate.

Another time two saints named Nicolas got confused with Santa Claus in a long and confusing story made clear by art. It is unfortunate that so much art, inspired, illiterate and romantic are lost to those who do not know or recognize the symbols in them. Even more unfortunate are the hell of plaster saints in modern and newer they would give you shiftiness just gazing upon them. Older churches reveal much more for those who take time to find meaning in Catholic symbols.

Comments are welcome at ocampo@pinoyme.com

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High Blood

Mary Lupus-Temple

PITO (also like he'd know) he's certain he is a victim of high blood pressure, and often wakes their blood pressure rise or makes them sit back, content that all's well with their world and with themselves. —Ed.

Prominence, pedigree carry much weight

I THOUGHT that Eric Aquino's bad judgments was confined only to matters of the heart. If indeed reports are accurate that she is inclined to support the United Opposition presidential candidate in 2004, who may either be Sen. Panfilo Lacson or Fernando Poe Jr., then her penchant for making bad judgment has in fact been extended to her political choices as well. If eventually she decides to support an opposition candidate, it she was prepared to share the political stage with the likes of Juan Ponce Enrile, Francisco Tatad, Imee Marcos and the rest of the marital law gang who are supposed to be on the opposition senatorial ticket?

An intelligent lady with a coveted political legacy, she should consider benchmarks such as competence, capability, character, credentials among other factors in her choice of presidential candidate. More importantly she should have a "sense of history" in endorsing a candidate, her prominence and pedigree carry much weight and much responsibility.

—EVELOU I. CRUZ,
10 Gumamela Street,
Capitol Green Village,
Tandang Sora, Quezon City

Motivate toward action

All the lyrics of a song in 'Miss Saigon' says: "Out is a sign of what we can be given moment have fulfilled wishes."

Many of our leaders in government are very good in issuing motherhood statements to exhort us to always to work for the common good. Fine, but some of our leaders use their credibility because of neglect in providing the resources at least the basic motivations or responsibilities call.

One effective motivation for students to stay in an institution is to help them in the education of their children or relatives in their care, even if their basic pay is too so high. This could be done through grants of full or partial scholarships to their children or close relatives. And other scholarships could be given those who take educative courses, with some sort of agreement to serve in government schools for a minimum period after graduation.

Our leaders would be able to encourage people to serve the country by providing for the basic needs of the citizens to live with dignity. Otherwise, we shall continue wasting and losing one of our most vital resources as a nation... our own people.

—RUEN VILLAFUERTE,
bvr@mnlgnet.com

LETTERS

Revoke authority of Meralco to raise rates

THE FREEDOM from Sole Coalition calls upon the Energy Regulatory Commission to immediately revoke the provisional authority granted to Meralco, allowing it to raise its rates by 23 centavos/kWh starting January 2004.

The ERC must not make a mockery of the processes especially pertaining to rates adjustments. Most of all, the regulatory agency must not be subservient to the propensity of utilities for asking for a provisional rate increase to the expense of the consuming public.

The FDC observed that the ERC often grants provisional relief in favor of utilities to the detriment of consumers. Often, the provisional relief is a fait accompli because the final decision is almost always the same as the provisional authority.

The ERC has jumped the gun on consumers when it allowed Meralco to raise its rates. Prior to the release of the ERC's order, the FDC, together with other consumer groups, has filed a motion at the commission asking Meralco to produce certain documents to support its petition. The ERC chose to go ahead in granting relief to Meralco even acting on the consumers' legitimate requests.

On the other hand, consumers are not impressed with the ERC's insistence that it will order a refund if the ERC finds, after the completion of the hearings, that the rate adjustment is unjust and unreasonable. Until this time, Meralco has yet to complete the refund of more than P20 billion that the Supreme Court ordered returned to consumers. Meralco even claims that the court-ordered refund has caused hard cash flow problems, prompting the need to raise its rates.

Thus, the FDC demands that the ERC immediately revokes its order granting Meralco the provisional authority to increase its rates. The FDC further demands that it be brought public scrutiny over Meralco's claims for overdue rate increases. These claims, particularly the 42 expansion projects, should be thoroughly examined and checked whether or not they are indeed necessary for the public good and Meralco should not be allowed to finance its capital expenditures from rate increases.

—LEVI S. NAZPE,
secretary general,
Freedom from Debt Coalition,
31 Batiaga St., Central District,
Quezon City

Abaya's words on Abus' end misinterpreted

I AM writing this rejoinder to the editorial "Unfinished business," (PDI, 12/10/03). I want to clarify an issue concerning the Armed Forces of the Philippines which we consider as a misinterpretation of the real message.

I would like to give particular attention to your reading of the statement of AFP Chief of Staff Gen. Narciso L. Abaya, that with the fall of Edith Amilang the Abu Sayyaf problem has been solved. This is not what Abaya wanted to stress in his statement. He was merely pointing out that of the original 33 Abu Sayyaf members involved in the Sipadan hostage-taking, five have already been neutralized including Majir Sawadjaan and Amilang.

The statement did not in any way mean that the Abu Sayyaf problem is already totally solved. In fact, Abaya has ordered AFP units deployed in the Abu Sayyaf-affected areas to intensify their operations against the terrorist group and exploit the gains that the AFP has achieved as a result of the capture of Amilang.

—DANIEL L. LUTERO III (Ft),
chief, Public Information Office,
Camp Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo,
Quezon City

Notorious political turncoat in Sorsogon

I PROTEST and deplore the grand assemblage of the notorious Sorsogon ERC ram (LDP Gov. Raul S. Lee in his radio interview at GMB and dzFE last Sept. 2, 2003. In that radio interview, he bragged that the Lakas provincial membership in Sorsogon was being offered to him since last year. Putting aside his thanks Presidents Macapagal-Arroyo only now by accepting the membership of Lakas in Sorsogon. I hope and pray that the Lakas officials especially Secretary General Mike Defensor, would not accept Lee in Lakas, for it will surely dehumanize the existing organizational setup of the Lakas coalition in Sorsogon.

The old gun can never learn. Since time immemorial, this politician has had nothing to stand on—loyalties. This time around he patched himself Sorsogon mayor and other elected officials as a party in power to make them believe that he is now the Lakas Party chair in Sorsogon.

He even made sure a few members of the Lakas secretariat, who were then on their way to Manila, not Sorsogon, were present at the party in his residence in Barangay Sibtacolan, Sorsogon City, moreover, he made the announcement of his being the provincial chair after his Lakas panel had left. Talagang mandudot! The truth is that the incumbent congressman of the 2nd district of Sorsogon, Jose C. Solis, remains the Sorsogon provincial chair of the Lakas Party. In a recent check with the Lakas NUCD party headquarters, a source staff there reiterated that there has been no change in the Lakas hierarchy, particularly in the province.

Another lie peddled by Lee is that he was never a turncoat-birthing. Lee claims that he still never member from one political party to another. This is simply hogwash! Sir Apao nito dun!! Know Lee as a die-hard KBL. After Edsa 1, he disheartedly reimbursed to his cockfighting buddy Pepito Estanislao's GDP fold again, in 1998, he transferred to Lamp. And now, he is singing a different tune.

He should really stop fooling the people of Sorsogon, especially to political leaders, for it boomerangs against his own political aspirations.

In 1995, former Rep. Bernhardt Gillego and the right arm Gov. Jose C. Hamilo, exposed Lee as a "turncoat-turncoat operator and malcontent" in the Congressional Committee on Good Government. I can only hope and pray that former Secretary Jose Lina would look to revive seven-year old case against Lee.

If ever he succeeds in his efforts to move over to Lakas, the coalition in our province would weaken and this could affect the chances of the Lakas candidates in the elections of 2004.

The acceptance of Lee into the coalition through Lakas or via other means will not sit well with us in our fight against graft and corruption.

—SORSOGONITES,
Blk. 11, Lot 20,
Phase 1, Our Lady's Village,
Barangay Pangpang,
Sorsogon 4700

Across the NATION
Assistant Editor Tony Bergonia

Group sues GMA to stop jailing of young offenders

By Nikko Dizon
INQ Central Luzon Desk

DALUPIRI CITY—Officials of the People's Recovery, Empowerment and Development Assistance (Preda) Foundation here have filed before the Ombudsman charges of "crime against humanity" against President Macapagal-Arroyo and other officials on Dec. 10.

Preda officials said they filed the 53-page complaint on behalf of all child prisoners in the country. The filing of the case was timed for the commemoration of International Human Rights Day last week.

For victims of police detention, aged 11 to 17, urged the Ombudsman to charge Mr Macapagal, Philippine National Police chief Director General Hermogenes Ebdane Jr., Local Government Secretary Jose Lina Jr. and Justice Secretary Simeon Datumanong with crimes against humanity for jailing children with adult prisoners "with impunity."

The children, represented child prisoners in different parts of the country, Preda said.

"Thousands of children, some as young as 12, are the inside of a Philippine prison in any given year. They are condemned without due process or respect for their legal and human rights and subject to inhuman conditions on P30 a day," Preda officials said in a statement.

The children decried the alleged rampant rape and torture inflicted on them by adult prisoners. The children also accused policemen of torturing and sexually molesting them while in custody.

Deprivation

The complaint said during detention, the children were deprived "of their fundamental right to quick release and immediate access to legal, medical, psychological, health, and social services and assistance."

According to 16-year-old Bet, an out-of-school youth, he was arrested for vagrancy and for stalling without. Bet said he was not given a separate detention cell but was put in a cell for adult detainees.

He told the Inquirer that the adult inmates molested him.

Kenny, 18, related he came repeatedly while in detention in a police jail in Metro Manila.

He said he was harassed by adult prisoners and was unfairly treated by jail guards. He said he was deprived of adequate food, water, clothing and bed while in detention.

Kenny, a former street child, was detained for robbery.

Both Bet and Kenny are in the custody of the Preda Foundation here.

Preda, quoting their records, said about children were beaten up, subjected to electric shock and threatened by policemen.

"This is the root cause of the crime in the Philippines, the maltreatment and abuse of children. Who is responsible if not the government? They must answer for it. They must act now to change the system," the Preda statement said.

Stop abuse

The Coalition to Stop Child Detention Through Restorative Justice, which is composed of at least 24 organizations nationwide, also urged the Ombudsman to order Mr Macapagal and her top officials to immediately stop the abuse of juvenile detainees.

The coalition asked the government to turn over arrested children in the custody of social workers or responsible members of the community.

"Mr Macapagal cannot hide behind the cloak of state immunity from suit since her administration's institutionalized practice of jailing kids with adults constitutes a crime against humanity," the coalition said in a separate statement.

The group asked Mr Macapagal to endorse Senate Bill of the Child and Youth Welfare Code, which mandates lawmen to consult with social workers upon the arrest of children and order their release to the custody of the Department of Social Welfare and Development.

SPORTS

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MACAPAGAL

ARROYO

SUAREZ

PACQUIAO

Big gathering of stars at PSA annual awards

THE PHILIPPINE Sportswriters Association will stage what is expected to be the biggest gathering of sports stars in recent years when it holds the 2003 PSA Annual Awards Night on Jan. 9 at the Manila Pavilion.

Malacañang has already acknowledged receipt of the copy of invitation sent by PSA president Robert G. Cuenca subject to confirmation of President Macapagal-Arroyo, who is expected to grace the occasion this year to personally present the awards and cash incentives to the athletes.

Two years ago, the Chief Executive graced

Tams take Champs' League title

For the second straight year the UAAP lived up to its billing.

For fourth-ranked off with a masterful 89-61 win over San Sebastian College-to bag the 2003 Champions' League crown yesterday at the Rizal Memorial Coliseum.

The Tamaraws thus kept the national championship in the UAAP fold following University of the East's triumph in the tournament inaugural last year.

"This is the product of our hard work. I give my 'hats off the youth," said winning coach Koy Banal, who earlier guided PEU the UAAP championship by defeating Ateneo.

The Tamaraws posted a 27-20 lead in the first quarter but found offender putting away the bugs.

Ray Alvarez led his cast against the fell PEU freshmen in the first half, hitting 10 of the Stags took a 35-20 lead midway in the second.

But Arwind Santos landed three consecutive three-pointers to spark another Tamaraw stampede for a 47-40 lead going to the locker room.

"It has been a great season for us, and we thank God for that," added Banal, who also guided PEU to the Beermg fans 163-life this year.

The Stags, runners-up in the NCAA, suffered as the onset of the fourth period behind Leo Najorda.

Scores

PEU (89)- Omar 16, Santos 12, Jao 14, Mabbs 14, Mendoza 12, Lanot 10, Banal I, Mendoza I, Alvarez 3, Ramos I, Manalo I

SBC (61)- Najorda 22, Abreu 10, Acosta 10, Arcadio 7, Manaloag 3, Bolayot 4, Balagtas 3, Ignacio 2, Ilo 1

Quarters: 27-20, 46-35, 70-51, 89-61

ARWIND! Santos of PEU soars for a layup in a scoring rein for the Tamaraws, who captured the Champions' League title over San Sebastian yesterday

Top SEAG athletes pay courtesy call on GMA

[illegible] 44 gold medalists who secured for Team Philippines fourth place overall in the recent 22nd Southeast Asian Games will pay a courtesy call on President Macapagal-Arroyo this morning.

The President and First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo are expected to greet the athletes and coaches at the Heroes Hall.

Both the President and the First Gentleman threw their support behind Team Philippines, which also took 34 silver and 75 bronze medals, all the way with Mr. Arroyo even flying to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh to cheer for the athletes.

The athletes will be presented to the First Couple by Philippine Sports Commission Chair Go Robiato.

Robiato said the PSC had focused its attention on the SEAG since November last year but he gave all credit to the athletes, who conquered the odds and showed they were not distracted by what others said were the demoralizing effect of the delay in their allowances.

1st Chairman's Cup
Fishing Open Tournament
GWKDII Angler's Club
Champion
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Tackle Shop

Big gathering of stars in PSA annual awards

From page B-5

the 1960s stars, presenting the top award shared by Fil-American golfer Dorothy Delasin and billiards king Efren "Bata" Reyes.

Manny Pacquiao, the "people's consensus" world featherweight champ and reigning International Boxing Federation super featherweight, and Cojuangco, the fourth Filipino to win the Bowling World Cup, head the awardees as co-winners of the Athlete of the Year plum.

Also high on the list of awardees are the women's team of Lisa del Rosario, Lizo Clemente and Cecilia Yap, who made history by becoming the first Asians to win a gold in the World Senior bowling championship, and the heartbreakingly softball squad which topped the Junior League World Series 13-1 4 decision.

Sports officials said the President, who failed to grace last year's edition, is not likely to accept the invitation considering her support to the campaign of Pangasinan[illegible] other athletes and the backing of First Gentleman Mike Arroyo in sports through the First Gentleman Foundation.

Other achievers, including the gold medalist in the last Southeast Asian Games in Vietnam, will be feted during the Awards Night sponsored by Red Bull and Agfa Color and supported by Sen. Miguel Zubiri, Philippine Olympic Committee, Philippine Sports Commission, Samsung, Philippine Basketball Association and Manila Mayor Lito Atienda.

The awardees:

Athlete of the Year—Manny Pacquiao and Cojuangco

PSA President's Award—Lisa del Rosario, Lizo Clemente and Cecilia Yap

Antonio M. Cabangon-Arevalo—Baseball girls' softball team

Hall of Fame—Dorothy Delasin and Celestino Tagud

Major awardees—Dorothy Delasin, women's golf; [illegible]; Hidilyn Diaz, [illegible]; Paeng Nepomuceno, [illegible]; Efren Reyes, billiards; Jesse Tiu, amateur boxing; Jerome Vite, amateur boxing; Mark Jacildo, [illegible]; Gladstone [illegible]; Nida Rodriguez, [illegible]; Joy Cabalu, Ronald Dulay, Philippine Track and Field Association; Philippine Bowling Congress, Senior Squad, Philippine Rowing Association; Samsung, Team Agfa.

Special awardees—Far Eastern University basketball team

[illegible]

Posthumous awardees—Felipe Vargas, Antonio Whiting, Rafael Cheng, Rene Policarpio, Manuel Lozano, Gilbario Camello, Pedro Adigue.

SPORTS TV

Compiled by L. Pangalo

Korean dies, another hurt in sea accident

By Jhunnex Napallacan
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—A group of seven South Korean tourists spending a holiday here lost one of their friends companions while another were nearly killed when the motorboat they hired for a sightseeing trip capsized in waters off Olango Island near Mactan Island at around 11 a.m. yesterday.

The victims, who were staying at the posh Shangri La Mactan Resort in Lapulapu City, were on an island hopping trip with few other companions on board motorboat Bicyla 6 owned by Ralph Cesar Celig when it capsized after it was hit by strong waves.

Supt. Louie Oppus, chief of the Lapulapu City police, identified the fatality as Kim Jin Ha, 27, of Seoul.

Oppus said Kim Jin Ha died upon reaching the community hospital in Olango Island, a small islet 5 miles off the east coast of Mactan Island or some 25 minutes by motorboat from Mactan.

Olango Island is a wildlife sanctuary that serves as a safe refuge for more than 10,000 migratory birds from East Asia and Australia.

Another female South Korean, Kim Suk Yong, was also in critical condition.

CAMP VICENTE LIM, Laguna—A day after Philippine National Police chief Director General Hermogenes Ebdane ordered a stepped up campaign against jueteng operations, the Calabarzon police on Tuesday presented 138 cohorts (collectors) and other individuals supervisors) arrested in a 24-hour drive against the illegal numbers game.

PNP Calabarzon Director Chief Supt. Reynaldo Berdin said police units in the region simultaneously launched 45 raids on different areas in the region that started on Monday morning until the following day.

Berdin said all of the arrested suspects were involved in pamilya-style operations of jueteng.

The Laguna and Rizal police officers arrested 60 suspects; the Batangas police captured 26 collectors, while the Quezon and Cavite police officers arrested 50 suspects, Berdin said.

The Laguna police, led by its provincial director Senior Supt. Edwin Corteza, initiated 29 raids on gambling dens in the province. Police seized leaflets and other gambling paraphernalia and more than P80,000 in bills.

Corteza said the campaign was not meant to decelerate his mission as the newly installed police chief of the Calabarzon area, said to be one of the jueteng hot spots in the country.

Berdin said the arrests came after a surveillance in towns where illegal gambling operations are known to proliferate.

Berdin, who belongs to class 1974 of the Philippine Military Academy, replaced Chief Supt. Jaime Caringal only last Friday.

He said from Jan. 1 until Dec. 15, 2,416 jueteng suspects had been arrested.

Jueteng had caused the downfall of President Joseph Estrada after his former pal, Chavit Singson, testified that proceeds from the illegal numbers game were delivered on a regular basis to Estrada and his son Jinggoy.

The operations of the illegal numbers game are believed to have been financed by Bong Revilla, tagged by authorities as one of the country's biggest gambling lords.

Marlon Ramos, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

SIMULTANEOUS RAIDS

Anti-'jueteng' drive nets 138

ELECTRIC SERVICE IN THESE AREAS WILL BE INTERRUPTED FOR SCHEDULED UPGRADING AND OTHER LINE WORK.

MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE

POSTED ONLINE AT OUR WEBSITE

100 Meralco

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2003

LAGUNA (MVE)
BETWEEN 9:00AM AND 2:00PM - FROM CIRCUIT LOS BAÑOS 12KV
Along Barangay Road from new National Road in Brgy. Mahiholo Bgy. Sta. Cruz including Bgys. Pagsky, Maraya, Pansol, Dita, Tranca and Sta. Rosa proper.

MAKATI: Reconstruction work along primary line along Barangay Road in Bgys. Palingon, Sta. Cruz, Pagsky, Maraya, Pansol, Dita and Sta. Rosa proper, Brgy. Laguna.

BIÑAN (SWCEC)
BETWEEN 9:00AM AND 1:00PM - FROM CIRCUIT DOLORES 4.0KM
Portion of Carmen Road including the Ortigas Avenue Extension including Blooming Hills Subd., Tower Hills Subd., Michaella Hills Subd. and portion of Manila East Road in Brgy. Dolores

MEANW: Relocation of facilities along Cabrera Road affected by DPWH road widening project.

MERALCO wants all efforts to restore electric service as scheduled. However, there are instances when due to unavoidable circumstances, restoration may extend beyond the published schedule.

For more information, please contact our CALL CENTER at telephone number 1622, fax nos. 9648-0504, or e-mail address ask.center@meralco.com.ph. For Cavite, Laguna or Batangas, please call the 24/7 Meralco Customer Satisfaction Number (SMS) indicated in your electric bills.

For those who prefer to receive this schedule via e-mail, please write us at ask.center@meralco.com.ph and type in the phrase "Request for weekly schedule".

HAVE A SAFE and MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Some public conveniences from Meralco:
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3 fishermen rescued in South Leyte seas

SOGOD, South Leyte—Three fishermen were rescued separately in waters off Southern Leyte on Wednesday, two days after their relatives reported them missing.

The Philippine Coast Guard in Eastern Visayas said rescue operations were still ongoing for the five other fishermen, including a 16-year-old boy, who failed to return home after sailing off in separate pump boats also on Monday.

Member Reinaldo of the Coast Guard identified the rescued fishermen as Salvador Bacud, 23, Anthony Cerso and Danilo Plana, both 28.

Still missing were Jhuny Maldo-ray 16, Ramon Rasoria, 50, Danilo Perugo, 28, Roy Gallano, 32, and Mallan Vergara, 15.

The fishermen were from the island barangay of Manicani off Eastern Samar, Eastern Visayas.

Reinaldo said Bacud was in his pump boat when he was rescued by the crew members of the fishing vessel Delos Ayo-3, which passed by the area.

Bacud said there was a downpour hours after he left Manicani at about 5 p.m. Waves capped into the engine, causing it to conk out.

He said he tried to revive the engine but it would not start. "It was then that I started to feel hopeless . . . that I would die. I did not think had prayed for my family and me," he said.

Joey Sadullo, PDI Visayas Bureau

SUPREME CAROLING
Chief Justice Hilario Davide (2nd from left) and Associate Justice Dante Tinga (2nd from right) sing Christmas carols with children of farm workers in Negros Occidental who sang Christmas carols to the chief justice hoping to win the court's heart for the agrarian reform cases their parents are involved in. The children sought Davide's help for their parents who have been charged with various cases by landlords seeking to evade agrarian reform.

Mayor's bodyguards held for gun ban violation

By Jhunnex Napallacan
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—Two police bodyguards of a municipal mayor in Southern Leyte province were arrested on Wednesday for violating the election gun ban.

PO3 Dulce Abora and PO2 Rosalie Sadon, bodyguards of Mayor Leandro Tirol of Sogod, Cebu town, were detained at the Lapulapu police station pending the filing of criminal charges against them.

The two policemen were caught carrying their firearms inside the Lapulapu City Hall of Justice while attending a hearing of the libelous case filed by Tirol against Rebel Rep. Roberto Capa and his wife Judith.

Tirol claimed that Judith was still married to Alexis Lao of Danao City, Cebu when she and Capa were wed in Lapulapu City in the early 1990s.

Supt. Louie Oppus, chief of the Lapulapu City police station, said Abora and Sadon had written requests for their .45 cal. pistols issued by Supt. Sancho Bernales, Bohol provincial police chief.

He, however, said the policemen did not secure an exemption from the Commission on Elections (Comelec) on the gun ban, which started Dec. 15.

He said the policemen are not allowed to bring their firearms unless they secured an exemption from the Comelec.

Oppus ordered Insp. Renato Magtes, head of the Lapulapu police intelligence and investigation section, to go to the Hall of Justice after Bernales forwarded a request of Branch 47 hearing the regional divorce, informed him of the presence of the two armed men.

These armed men turned out to be Sadon and Bohol who were immediately invited for questioning at the Lapulapu police station.

Oppus said Tirol's lawyer Salvador Solitta Landmarked him over the phone and demanded the release of the policemen.

But Oppus said he told Solitta to direct his request to the NBI because he just acted on an inter-department order from NBI, which would file the charges against the policemen.

Solitta reviewed the police for arresting Abora and Bohol even if they had presented their station orders.

The two policemen, he added, were there to secure Tirol due to threats on the mayor's life.

Former Rangers chief-of-staff receives award from President

A FORMER chief of staff of the Scout Rangers became one of the Army unit's members in rites recently attended by President Macapagal-Arroyo.

Retired Col. Ramon Lim, former chief of staff of the Rangers, received a plaque of appreciation from Mrs. Macapagal for helping speed up the release of medical supplies for the regiment's medical missions.

Lim received the award for facilitating the delivery of medicines and other medical supplies to areas where the Scout Rangers were helping poor patients get medical treatment.

Lim was one of the Scout Ranger awardees presented with plaques and medals by the President in her visit to the Scout Rangers' base at Camp Tecson in Barangay Tartaro in San Miguel, Bulacan.

Lim had been a recipient of other awards from the Army for bravery and gallantry in battle during the Moro secessionist war in Mindanao.

Aside from Lim, the President also gave awards to Capt. Rhoan Alimodarse for acts of courage and gallantry during an encounter with MT Abu Sayyaf members in Isabela, Basilan on Oct. 7, 2003.

BUSINESS

E-mail at business@inquirer.com.ph
Editor Raul D. Pangalangan
Assistant Editor Corrie S. Mariano

IMF raises RP growth forecast for 2004

By Clarissa S. Batino

GROWTH of the Philippine economy will accelerate in 2004 after hitting 4 percent in 2003, but crucial reforms must still be carried out, the resident representative of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said.

IMF representative Masahiko Takeda warned the fund would have to continue its "post program monitoring" of the Philippine economy, an apparent sign of uncertainty over the implementation of economic reforms.

Takeda said that gross domestic product (GDP) growth would increase to 4.2% percent in 2004, up from the Fund's original forecast of 4 percent growth for next year.

The government is confident GDP will hit at least 4.2 percent this year and are expecting growth to range from 4.5 to 5.0 percent in 2004.

Takeda told reporters the economy had shown "resilience" in weathering the effects of the Iraq war, the SARS outbreak and bad weather which had ugly realities in the first half of the year.

The upturn in the global economy next year will likely buoy the Philippine economy further, he added.

But he warned that "a series of events since July has led to increased pressure on the peso, sovereign bond spreads and domestic interest rates."

This was an apparent reference to the short-lived coup attempt by military rebels in July and various political conflicts with the opposition in Congress.

"Inflows of foreign direct investments have been constrained by competition from within the region, as well as concerns about the business environment," the official said.

The IMF praised improved fiscal performance but stressed the government must push through with other controversial revenue measures possibly including an increase in the value-added tax and a cut on the popular cell phone text messages.

"Consideration should be given to specific policy measures such as raising and indexing excise taxes on alcohol, tobacco and petroleum products in addition to other possible steps," Takeda said.

"It will also be important to enact proposals for new tax amnesties given the harmful impact that repeated amnesties have on taxpayer compliance."

He also warned the country's power sector remained a serious problem with the state-run generator, National Power Corp., suffering increasing losses.

Takeda said the government was not seeking a new credit program with the IMF with both sides agreeing the IMF would continue to "post program monitoring."

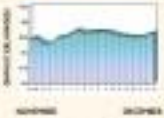
"We have come to an agreement. It is a normal comfort level," he said.

But would entail two regular monitoring missions each year to check on the country's economic indicators and its adherence to a reform program.

He called for the implementation of measures fully privatizing the electrical industry, saying

(BOTTOM)

CURRENCIES



PESO-DOLLAR RATE

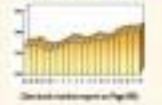
$1 = ₱52.211 as of 4 p.m., Dec. 18, 2003

₱100 = $1.84 as of 4 p.m., Dec. 18, 2003

GOLD: $408.20-408.70 per ounce in Hong Kong, Dec. 19, 2003

STOCK MARKET

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX



(See stock market report on Page B8)

Stocks end up on yearend window dressing

SHARES closed on a five-week high yesterday, led by Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT), as players continued their profit-taking window dressing before the year ends.

Dealers said the market's slow rise may also attract profit-taking, particularly by those wanting to secure their money ahead of the long Christmas holidays.

There are only five trading days (left in 2003 after the government declared Dec. 24, 26 and 31 as holidays.

The main stock index climbed 12.21 points or 0.81 percent to 1,510.77 points. It was the highest closing level since Nov. 10, pushing the market's gains to 38.03 percent this year.

"It's just window dressing for the yearend. Most investors are not yet thinking of next year's elections," said Spencer Yap, senior investment analyst of BPI Securities Inc.

"It's likely we will see some correction next week. Some people don't want their money tied up over the extended holiday," Yap said the market was targeting the year-high of 1,531 points in the near term.

Turnover rose slightly to P927.36 million from P913.86 million of Wednesday. Despite the gains in the main index, losers outnumbered gainers 74 to 70, showing the mixed sentiment in the market. —Reuters

BSP keeps rates unchanged

SUBSCRIBER-MEMBERS Monetary Board of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas has decided to keep its key overnight rates steady at 6.5% percent for borrowing and 8 percent for lending.

BSP Governor Rafael Buenaventura said the current policy rates were sufficient to support the government's growth objectives while keeping consumer prices stable.

"Prospective developments on the monetary policy stance will continue to preserve a careful balance between caution and the need to ensure that the macroeconomic environment remains conducive to credit-induced and investment-led activity," the BSP chief said.

Buenaventura said monetary authorities was inclined to raise the BSP rates to handle volatile peso or to tempt it lower further and help accelerate a slow-moving economy.

"The policy environment is not interest rate driven. The sentiment driven and very temporary. Since the speculators have come up with a currency platform that would address the shortcomings in the economy, then the peso would stay stubborn," he said. —Dennis Z. Datiles

Serenity

Serenity Columbarium

GROUND BREAKING

Serenity Columbarium had their ground breaking last September 14, 2003 marking the birth of a dignified place of peace and beauty and tranquil ambience. Offering more than 4,000 niches on an air-conditioned three story building and strategically located at 390 Taft Ave., Ermita, Manila (in front of NBI).

Group bids ₱5.2B for Subic project

By Michelle V. Rama

THE JAPANESE Shimizu-Penta-Ocean-Tsu consortium has moved closer to winning the contract to develop the modernized Subic Bay seaport after it submitted the lowest bid price of ₱5.2 billion.

Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority Chief Felicito Payumo said the ₱5.2-billion bid price was ₱500 million lower than the ₱5.700 billion offered by its rival bidder and joint developer Toyo Corp.

The SBMA has earlier announced the development contract is worth ₱6.9 billion.

Payumo said the SBMA would finish its evaluation of the bid documents in 30 days after which the winner will be announced.

The construction of the seaport project, which was expected to encourage the entry of more foreign investors in cities, is scheduled to begin in April 2004.

The Japan Bank for International Cooperation will finance the seaport project, which is part of the long-term development plan of the SBMA and the Bases Conversion Development Authority for Central Luzon.

BCDA President and Chief Executive Officer Rolo Colayco said in an earlier briefing that the construction of the seaport would complement the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway Project (SCTEP) in efforts to transform Central Luzon into an "economic enclave" independent of Metro Manila.

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Metro Pacific cuts debt by ₱500M

By Doris C. Dumlao

METRO Pacific Corp., the local holding company of Hong Kong-based First Pacific Co. Ltd., has reduced its unresolved debt burden to last month's ₱800 million level (US$14 million) following the retirement of some ₱500 million in debt through dation en pago or payment in kind.

MPC president Jose Ma. Lim yesterday told reporters that the remaining unresolved debt stock could be easily managed by the company's cash flows.

"We are on track with our targets," Lim said.

The unresolved debt refers to debt that has not been restructured or retired through dation en pago arrangements.

MPC used to carry a debt burden of ₱2.3 billion, but it was reduced by about half when MPC gave up its controlling stake in Bonifacio Land Corp., the developer of the Fort Bonifacio Global City, for ₱6 billion in favor of the Ayala-Campos group.

MPC also entered into a deal with the Metropolitan Bank and Trust Co. to restructure some ₱2 billion in debt over remaining term.

"We're trying to bring debts down to a level which can be monitored by our cash flows," Lim said.

Lim said that MPC preferred these dation en pago arrangements because it would rid the company of substantial interest payments.

He added that MPC was looking forward to a good year next year depending on MPC's ability to further reduce debt, the entry of a new strategic partner for shopping mall Pilgrim Navigation Co. and the launch of new businesses.

Oil firms forge agreement on Pandacan depot

By Abigail L. Ho

PETRON Corp., Pilipinas Shell Petroleum Corp. and Caltex (Phil.) Inc. have finalized the terms of the joint operation of the Pandacan oil depot through three joint venture firms, Pandacan Oil Terminals Services Inc.

In a joint statement, the oil firms said they have finalized the commercial agreement governing the management and operation of Pote, pending their attack with their plan to register the joint venture company by year's end or by early next year.

Each firm will put in at least ₱500 million to put up the company.

"We are confident that with the commercial agreement in place and the establishment of joint operations for the common distribution facility, the three companies will be better positioned to serve the country's energy needs more efficiently while generating greater investor and power of mind to the residents of Pandacan," Caltex corporate affairs manager Marian Cabahug said.

Under a memorandum of understanding signed with the Manila city government last year, the three oil companies are required to dismantle 20 of the 54 tanks in the depot. To date, 24 of the 20 tanks had been decommissioned and dismantled with the last two to follow by March 2004.

The companies also need to set up "green buffer zones" between the tanks and the residential areas surrounding the oil terminal. "We firmly believe that the MOU and projects aims remain the most viable long-term option since it addresses the concerns of Pandacan residents while ensuring the stable and uninterrupted supply of petroleum products in the country," Shell external affairs general manager Roberto Kanapi said.

The Pandacan oil depot supplies around 10 percent of Luzon's fuel needs and around 82 percent of Metro Manila's gasoline and diesel requirements.

China Bank play

MANILA Stanley Ty is in a really busy (or scrapping-up stocks of China Bank, despite market rumors that the mall king already has accumulated a directorship over the Don Mariano bank.

Following his buy-hi-buy-hoping strategy he has religiously employed since Brussels days, Ty acquired 2,200 China Bank shares last month, even going out to the extent of registering the stocks under his own name.

Despite the steady accumulation, the Ty camp has maintained a no-comment policy on China Bank, especially in the light of a court case filed in October by the Panlilios over the disposal of the voting shares held by a Taiwanese bank.

Originally offered to the Panlilios, the disputed China Bank shares were instead sold by the Taiwanese bank International Commercial Bank of China to new foreign fund companies through stockbroker Eddie Gotiong, a known ally of the Tys.

What is even stranger now is that a week after the Panlilios nominated their damage suit against the injunction buyers, Yvonne Ty-Sarayo, daughter of tapos Alfonso Panlilios, was elevated to the China Bank board, add 11 out of the 16 China Bank shares listed in her name.

The Ty-Sarayo daughter, who certainly did not need the money, disposed of the lots, at P680/share, for a grand total of P7,535. Was the Panlilio-Ty daughter sending a message? She declined to say what, if there is any at all.

MVP's price target

PLDT started the year at P267.50/share. Yesterday, it closed at: P918. How much further is the resurgent telecom stock going to go?

If you have little as clue of outgoing president Manuel V Pangilinan, PLDT should go back to the good, old P1,400/level. That's how much MVP paid for the stock when he acquired 1,000 shares two decades ago.

Following MVP's action, another PLDT director, Ambassador to Washington Alfredo Romualdez, has also asked his brokers to start accumulating the stock. For the month of November, Del Rosario acquired, according to the grapevine, 14,700 shares of PLDT despite

CONTINUED ON B2

COCKTALES

Victor C. Agnotes

AUCTION SALE

Gov't keeps 11-month budget gap within target

By Cielito S. Ibañez

THE MACAPAGAL administration has contained the budget deficit in the first 11 months to P172.2 billion against a ceiling of P189.7 billion due to strong revenue collection and restrained spending.

Preliminary data showed that the budget gap in November stood at only P8.31 billion, or less than half of the P17.8-billion target.

"The deficit as of November is at P172 billion. We have a P183-billion headroom with only a month to go," said Finance Secretary Jesus Jimenez.

As of October, the gap between revenues and expenditures stood at P163.88 billion or P9 billion lower than the ceiling of P173.88 billion for the 10-month period. By November, the headroom had increased to about P17.2 billion against the target.

Attaining said the good fiscal performance in November would bolster the government's bid to bring down the deficit this year even below the P202-billion ceiling and the P205.7 billion a year ago.

Revenues exceeded the P614 billion goal in November by about P4 billion while expenditures fell more than P5 billion below the programmed P72.2-billion for month.

After exceeding spending targets from July to October, the budget department tightened its hold on disbursement and capped expenditures way below the ceiling.

National Treasurer Sergio Edosa earlier said that the budget deficit this year would be below P180 billion.

This year could be the first time in five years that the government would bring down its budget deficit below the original target. Last year, the Macapagal administration blew three deficit targets and ended the year with a shortfall of P232.7 billion against the original ceiling of P130 billion.

This month, however, expenditures are seen to spike to finance an impoundment P6-billion cash gift to government employees. Even with the additional spending, however, Edosa said the government "would not exceed the P202-billion deficit target.

Cocktales ...

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Christmas for the swine industry

By Ernesto M. Ordoñez

THIS Christmas will be a happy one for people in the swine industry. The reason is that ham, pork prices in provinces like Laguna, Rizal and Pampanga are now at P74/Kilo a kilo. This is a welcome increase from a low of P64-P66 a kilo last year before the smuggling of pork was curbed, thanks to the combined efforts of the government and vigilant farmers.

COMMENTARY

But for Dr. Hospicio Tinsol, the technical committee chair of the National Federation of Hog Farmers Inc. (NFHFI), it will be a bleak Christmas unless something happens quickly in the Senate.

Dr. Tinsol said, "Ever since we allowed the importation of meat products from foot and mouth disease (FMD) infected countries 18 years ago, we have wanted an anti-FMD bill that would stop this practice that poses contamination threat to the local swine industry. We had also joined the House of Representatives to agree on this, the Senate version (SB 1800) is still with the Senate committee on agriculture. If not presented to the full Senate for deliberation soon, we may have to wait for another three years because we will have newly elected legislators whom we have to orient. Only March. Meanwhile, a major FMD outbreak may occur because of this inaction."

Losses due to FMD

In fact, two years after the importation from FMD countries started, the swine industry experienced P2 billion in losses from 1,554 FMD outbreaks with 96,004 reported cases. This was so damaging that then President Fidel Ramos declared Luzon, where the FMD outbreaks happened or occurred, a calamity area under EO 203.

Since then, efforts have been made to eradicate FMD. Today, more than P1.2 billion is spent annually on anti-FMD measures. If our country were FMD-free, this expense would be eliminated and passed on to consumers for lower pork prices. To the Department of Agriculture's credit, Visayas and Mindanao, as well as Palawan and Masbate, are now FMD-free.

Increased importation

But according to NFHFI president Alberto Lim Jr., this improved FMD situation is seriously threatened by the increasing importation of meat from FMD infected countries, particularly India. From only one million kilos in 1991, meat imports rose to 55 million kilos last year. That same year, India had a staggering 2,098 FMD outbreaks, with 67,427 reported cases. And though India is a world leader in appropriate technology and low-priced drugs, this success is not germane in their control of FMD. As a result, many countries ban Indian sanitized imports, with the Philippines as one of the few exceptions.

Lim contends that importing Indian sanitized meats is not a necessity due to the swine industry. This not only endangers the livelihood that affects the 3.6 million people dependent on this industry. There is also the loss of potential jobs from the possible exports of our swine products.

In a forum hosting Sen. Gil Aga, Agriculture Secretary Luis Lorenzo cited two examples of this: "There was an attempt to export frozen fresh pork to Singapore, but it did not push through because of the FMD issue. In Malaysia, arrangements were made to export ice cream, but this was not approved by the Malaysian Veterinary Services Department due to FMD presence."

The other side

There is, however, another side to this debate. According to Francisco Buencamino, executive director of the Philippine Association of Meat Processors, there are internationally approved ways of importing from FMD-infected countries without the risk of FMD contamination. If these are carefully followed, the benefits to consumers is tremendous. Indian sanitized ham for P80 a kilo, less than half of the P170 a kilo for beef rump today. If the meat processors are no longer allowed to import Indian sanitized, the price of a can of corned beef will increase by approximately 10 percent, since the beef raw material constitutes half of the total product's price. Buencamino believes the solution is to ensure that the measures to prevent FMD contamination are followed, and not to ban these imports. The farmers will argue that if these measures are not effective, they will continue to oppose these imports, and they will be justified in doing so.

So far, the farmers have shown a refreshing openness to changes in their stand and position. Last Dec. 8, considering that smoking their meat products would minimize the risk of FMD contamination, they are now advocating a ban on fresh and frozen meat products from FMD countries. The openness can be harnessed in coming out with a law that will achieve both agriculture development and consumer welfare objectives. That a law is in fact needed urgently is the position of several groups such as the Philippine Veterinary Drug Association and the Philippine Peasant Institute, which also serves as the secretariat of the Alyansa Agrikultura.

Recommendation

Last Nov. 11, the Senate committee on agriculture constituted a technical working group to discuss this matter. Aside from government officials, the private sector representatives for the TWG include Timbol, Lim and Buencamino. Up to now, this TWG has not been called to a meeting to thresh out these issues. Thus, Timbol fears a delayed committee report and the consequent death by negligence of the bill. An announcement before Christmas on when this meeting will take place and a collective move that a committee report will be given to the Senate in January make Senate deliberation impossible, and will do much in assuring Timbol and the rest of the swine industry that their Christmas joy mentioned be limited to today's temporary high swine prices.

(The author is chair of Agriwatch, a private sector initiative, former undersecretary of agriculture and trade and industry and former chair and cabinet secretary for Presidential Flagship Programs and Projects. For inquiries or suggestions, e-mail agriwatch@kfg.yahoo.com or telefax 812-0716/05.)

CDC asked to return P500M worth of Mimosa assets

By Doris C. Dumlao

MONDRAGON International Philippines has demanded the return of over P500 million worth of assets which were allegedly confiscated from the Mimosa estate farms by Clark Development Corp.

In a letter to the CDC, a copy of which was sent to the Philippine Stock Exchange, company chair and CEO Jose Antonio Gonzales said Mondragon was willing to cede its right over Mimosa provided the confiscated assets would be returned to it and that its creditors would be paid.

Gonzales stated that when CDC took over the Mimosa estate in 1999, it did not have the authority to confiscate movable assets. He said that some P400 million worth of assets were seized, over and above those that were already listed in the agreement between the two companies.

"Likewise, we stand you to retain the P1.2 million taken by CDC from the casino vault and approximately P20 million from the Holiday Inn for business transacted before the writ of execution. We have receipts to this effect," Gonzales said.

For the last three months, Gonzales said Mondragon had been told that there was a foreign investor keen on the facility.

"However, if there really is an investor, what is the need to advertise for parties interested to manage Mimosa? If so, should this party not be introduced to us?" he said, referring to reports that CDC will bid out the management of Mimosa.

"Unless Mondragon is part of the solution, this shall be opposed by us vigorously. Instead of all these happening, our assets should be returned immediately," he stressed.

Gonzales said Mondragon was prepared in all doors and discuss how best to resolve the conflict with CDC.

He warned that Mondragon could resort to litigation if CDC would not hear its woes.

"It has been almost five years when, on Dec. 14, 1998 our estate was invaded and closed illegally by police Special Action Forces numbering over 100," Gonzales said.

"Since then, we have been practically without income and the last day we continue to exist is an act of Providence. But our backs are against the wall and we must protect our shareholders," he said.

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IMF raises RP growth . . .

[illegible] than recent private investments were necessary to ensure that there would be "adequate generation (capacity) over the medium term."

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Rafael Buenaventura, the country's chief negotiator with the IMF, yesterday said that the Philippines still needed the third-party monitoring program with the Fund.

"We still need it for one year. It is not a bad idea while we try to complete our reform program," he said the central bank chief.

The no-loss monitoring set-up that began in 2001 was to end this year as the country had brought down its outstanding obligations with the IMF to less than 100 percent of its quota in November.

But an extension seemed necessary because of the prevailing volatile political situation. The IMF's seal of good housekeeping is deemed beneficial for countries like the Philippines where political risks have been weighing down the economy.

National Treasurer Angelo Tiamzon, who is in constant touch with foreign investors and creditors, said the IMF monitoring program would help build confidence.

"It gives investors and creditors extra confidence that if the country is under a PPM, then we are working under certain parameters that won't go overboard," he added. With a report from AFP

DISCLOSURES

ELECTED directors of **SM Holdings Inc.** were Hans Sy, Jose T. Sio, Ronato Dujua, Jesus Tan, Miguel Ozamiz Tan, Emma Yang Ocampo-Tan, Frado Gonzales, Marilou Tan, Evgeni Sulay Jr., Romeo Ang and Remedios Ramos.

PCIB, Commercial Banking Corp. disclosed the resignations of Jaime Pangandian as executive vice president and treasurer and Jorge Pajarot as executive vice president and chief risk officer. Director Susanne Santos was designated as concurrent acting treasurer. Also designated were Marissa Cuyco as officer-in-charge for treasury department and Joseph Moncino as OIC of corporate risk management.

SECURITY Bank Corp. disclosed that Albert V. Villaraza, senior executive vice president and chief operating officer, bought 10,000 shares of the bank at P16.75 per share.

ELECTED trustees of **San Miguel Properties Inc.** were Ramon Ang, Jeronimo Kilayko, Ferdinand Constantino, Elmer Santos, Alexander Reyno, Aurelio Alfonso and Carmelo Santiago.

BANK of the Philippine Islands will hold its annual stockholders' meeting on March 24 at 8 a.m.

ELECTED directors of **Manila Corp.** were Antony Tan, Michael Sutton, Andrew Alcott, Patrick Go, Mario Theran Santos, Juan Gonzalez and Jose Fernando Iglesias. The company will change its name to **Manila Semiconductors Corp.** and amend its primary purpose from that of a holding company to a semiconductor manufacturing company. *Compiled by Eloisa C. Silva/PDI Research*

ALI sees higher profit this year

By Dona R. Torija

[illegible] property giant Ayala Land Inc. expects to end the year with better profit than last year's P5.12 billion.

"It should be better than the previous year," outgoing ALI president Fernando Zobel de Ayala III told reporters in a briefing yesterday. "Growth will come from the middle income, both from commercial and mass housing."

Lamentin said ALI's entry into the middle income market was a "major strategic move" and that area should be a "major source of growth."

Lim last year, the property firm launched The Columns, an affordable three-tower residential high-rise project at the edge of the Makati Central Business District. It also began the construction of Market! Market!, a retail center targeting the low to middle income market.

He disclosed that the firm next year would develop a middle-to-upper residential subdivision at a project south of Metro Manila and probably launch a project in The Columbus and, additionally a similar high-end project in Fort Bonifacio.

ALI has already sold 95 percent of the 900 units of the first tower of The Columns, 80 percent of the second tower and has recently launched the third tower, Lieutenant, who will be replaced by former general manager for international consultancy giant Watson's in the Philippines James Ryan, next year, said.

He estimated that capital expenditures next year would be far lower than this year's level.

On the property firm's financing plans, Lieutenant said: "In general company level we would like to tap the capital markets more to allow our arms to obtain financing from banks."

airborne access

Look Ma, No Wires!

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The Airborne Access | Free-for-all leg
Wi Fi LaunchTour | December 20, 2003
Tequila Joe's (Pueblo, Ortigas Center)
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If you own a PDA, a Smartphone or a mobile PC, you're invited to come! Just present your device at the entrance!

Activities

Celebrity Chat Session — Get to and meet your favorite celebrity online community, seriously using [illegible] Philippines' [illegible] the [illegible] can be [illegible] over the Internet

Tech Demos — Let experts demonstrate the power of Wi-Fi technology on your mobile phone or mobile PC. Demos will be [illegible] you get [illegible] scanned

Join the Mobile Community — Meet the officers and members of the country's [illegible] Share your [illegible] Provide tips and [illegible] become a member

FREE Wi-Fi Access — Get instruction and hands-on experience surfing the Internet wirelessly across blazing-fast [illegible] and learn what we [illegible] anywhere using the best [illegible] around

Lots of prizes to be given away!!!

Casino Filipino

BIG Yuletide EVENTS

"Sanno - Jaya Sannin'"
featuring JANNO GIBBS & JAYA
December 19, 2003 • Friday, Friday at 10:00 PM
Casino Filipino Pavilion

"Christmas Serenade"
featuring PINKY AMADOZ, GARY LIVING & JOHN GOMES
December 24, 2003 • Friday, Friday at 10:00 PM
Casino Filipino Pavilion

PNB

Casino Filipino

'It's All About Men!'

MISS HAVE misadvised. If you're a man and you feel that you deserve to feel good about yourself, look your best and treat yourself to life's pleasures, a definite treat is in store for you. In the meantime, if you want your man to receive gifts, clothes and sophisticated, and you want to get him that ideal Christmas gift, you better see this.

Limelight Entertainment Productions has conceptualized "It's All About Men", a male unique experience-a one-stop shop that celebrates what's cool in men's essentials and edibles are showcased. The 3-day event scheduled for Dec. 19 to 21 at the SM Megamall Megatrade Hall 1, provides the perfect venue for looking for ideal gifts for men.

Products and services ranging from health/fitness (Pinta Corp, Bodywise, Tayion International and many more), grooming essentials (skincare and hair styling), lifestyle living (such as furniture, condominiums and furnishings from Sunny and Nickel Philippines), golf equipment, scooters (ScootMike), travel and leisure options (exciting vacation spots courtesy of Leader Holidays International, Pearl Pacific World of Leisure, Vacation Club International and Sunrise Holiday Concepts), golf equipment, clothing and accessories from Taylor Made golf, adidas Golf Concepts Store) as well as a wide variety of shirts, pants, underwear, socks and shoes are but a few products that will be available.

Featured highlights are the event from the most famous as activities such as a special presentation by the world-renowned John Hubert Powers on "power dressing and grooming tips" make the event a must-see on the last weekend before Christmas. Entrance is free. For more details, call Limelight Entertainment Productions at 895-0294, 0908.8496771 or (0917) 8869006.

The 3-day event provides the perfect venue for looking for ideal gifts for men

LIFESTYLE Trend Spotting

THE SWATCH Bijoux Limited necklace can be worn in various ways and is a great gift for young fashionistas

Lito Chela Banal Portuna

LOVE Exploisive rings from the Swatch Bijoux Collection are stylish and affordable baubles

Gifts with oomph for your loved ones

SIX days to go before Christmas! Are you done shopping and distributing gifts?

It's always easy to find token gifts when you can give to just about everyone. A scented candle, a pretty picture frame or a bottle of wine are all quite common but still useful to the recipient. But what about special presents for those closest to your heart?

I usually visit the best for last so I buy gifts for my husband, children, siblings, best friends and mother right before Christmas. I give a lot of thought on what to give each person, as I want him or her to feel extra special and loved. And if you are like me, it follows that you still have a lot of shopping to do.

Take a deep breath now and don't panic! Just take your pick from my picks of some of the season's most fashionable offerings.

APPLES' PICKINGS

Apples Aberia-Southcott

Cartier 's love cuffs

The perfect gift for your most special someone is Cartier's unisex Menotte bracelet. Its clasp-less shaped bloom as wrist bracelet that opens and closes with the use of a narrow screwdriver, the sleek new design symbolizes attachment and love. Available in white gold and pink gold with or without embellishments or gems, the Menotte line also includes rings designed not to be worn separated whenever and stacked one to a set of contrasting or gemstones.

The Jelly Belly

Trends and Trendings columnist and Philippine Tatler editor in chief Anton Diaz Borja called it the most have bag of the season and I must agree. Every fashionista has this most coveted bag on their wish list, if they are not toting it yet. It's versatile, fun and so much more affordable (and that's a major understatement) than the real thing. Plus, it comes in a variety of rainbow bright colors to suit each's personality.

CARTIER'S Menotte bracelet is a perfect fit to express in the game of seduction, a piece of jewelry that opens and closes, sending love right in

The bags are available at Ethos in Greenbelt 1 and Rockwell in Makati but they are selling at an incredibly fast pace.

Swatch Christmas collection

Best known for their fun, innovative

DECK your wrist in Paul Smith's printed shirts from the Automne/Hiver 2003 Collection

Careful, sexy curves ahead!

TRIUMPH International serves up a major temptation for those who want to take a walk on the wild side. Dangerous Curves, the new line of Triumph lingerie wear that gives women a potent weapon to launch their own "dangerous mission," is now available locally.

Triumph's Dangerous Curves line is sensuously seductive. Made to mold and accentuate a lady's natural charms, the boosters and matching panties seize every opportunity to enhance and flaunt all of a woman's feminine curves. The bra hugs and clings, like second skin, and yet gives support and lift where they are really needed.

Delicately molded cups provide discreetly strong support. The wicked, ultra-feminine straps are teasingly playful. They can be twisted and crossed, rigged and rugged, and adjusted to create any whimsical effect. The result is carrying classy, a knockout figure and sheer confidence.

The fit springs in the precise measurements are held in place by the finest stretch fabric, even as they expose tantalizing feminine curves. A word of warning for the faint of heart. The Dangerous Curves line all comes in black.

There are Dangerous Curves bras with rigging straps and matching low-cut tanga panties, chiso with crisscross design and matching miniskirt panties that come in forest green and black and, finally, the ultimate temptation, bras embedded with Swarovski crystals that come in three colors—light blue, tempting red and mysterious black.

This assorted collection of made-to-fit straps and detachables bras and matching briefs are now available at Triumph boutiques in leading department stores.

FOREST green version has push-up bra choice for fuller cleavage area and style spaghetti straps matching bikini briefs completes the collection.

NEW Maximiser Dangerous Curves bra with center-front-to-back zigzag straps

Gifts with oomph for your loved ones

designs and superior Swiss precision, Swatch has come up with a couple of limited-edition leather designs to celebrate the season: the Single Jungle red watch and colour belt and a detachable wristlet and the Harmony brooch. But if you wish to veer away from Yuletide themes, then check out any of Swatch's latest designs for both men and women.

The Swatch Bijoux collection also offers stylish yet affordable baubles. My favorites include the Lustre necklace, which you can wear in a variety of ways, and the Love Explosions rings that come in red, blue or black and white.

Personalized presents

It's always a pleasure to receive presents that are specifically made, labeled or monogrammed for the recipient. It shows that a lot of thought, care and effort went into the gift-giving process, which in turn signifies that the receiver is special to the giver.

Why not give out mini cards or stationery with the recipient's name or initials? You can have them made in specialty shops like Personalise It, which is located in Powerplant Mall and Shoppesville. Their items are inexpensive and they only need a couple of days to print out your orders.

If you want something a little more high-end, Papirio in the Powerplant Mall is the store for you. It's a bit too late to order personalized Cross's stationery, as it usually takes a month to fill an order but they also carry imported note cards that are very beautiful and of the highest quality.

Paul Smith printed shirts

Update your man's wardrobe by giving him a colorful graphic or floral shirt from the Paul Smith autumn/winter 2003 collection. It's the perfect, simple item to be worn effortlessly in his manner of dress.

Transcription continues on page C3

ing. More and more men are opting to wear color and bold prints.

So, these beauties are not gay nor metrosexuals. They are just regular he-men who are not trying to break out of the mold. Can't afford Paul Smith's line? Try Venezia's dandified, colorful and multi-printed collection that's available in fast-fast.

Chanel Precision Eclat Original

Beauty junkies will love receiving Chanel's latest offering, a three-in-one maximum radiance face cream that moisturizes, smoothens and provides a luminous quality. It literally gives tired looking skin a radiant glow. I use it in the mornings and before I go to sleep at night and I can honestly say that it is one of the best beauty products I have ever tried.

At the risk of contradicting myself and sounding trite, allow me to say that the best offering anyone can ever receive is the gift of true love. Merry Christmas to all!

E-mail the author at spmabini@hotmail.com

URBAN collection—canvas bags with Desierto Italian flax-leather trim

BRIDAL bag made of organza and satin with Swarovski crystal and pearls designed by Kenneth Chua

DESIGNER Jose Soriano, Alfa Filipinas president Jocelyn Veneracion and fashionista Joyce Dreiss Scuffer doing the ribbon-cutting honors at the Filipinas Alfa store opening

In store: bags galore

Robinsons Supermarket

WOW! Low, Low, Low Prices!

A Merry Countdown of Discounts
Dec 19 - 31, 2003

WOW! FRESH for Less

Text by Bea Fernuco
Photos by Roger Carpio

FBRAND local fashionistas can get their hands on stylish and classy Alfa bags without having to buy them abroad.

Filipinas Alfa, one of the country's most successful exporters of bags and small leathergoods, recently opened its newest Alfa store in the Ruffolo Square in Eastwood City Libis, for the shopping pleasure of local bag-freaks.

Designer Jose Soriano and model Joyce Dreiss Scuffer did the honors of cutting the ceremonial ribbon. A fashion show of the latest collections by young designers Kenneth Chua and Jil Louis followed.

Designed by Gen Dragon, this latest store presents a new look for Alfa in terms of overall ambiance. It has an artistic flavor that displays unique accents like an old coal-fired iron, oil lamp and bicycle, and elements accented by a leather workshop such as a wood, cement table and storage crates. Dragon will also create design consulting clients in Robinsons Place Manila, Robinsons Galleria and Festival Mall.

Every Alfa bag is proudly Philippine made, from the designs to the materials in its making. Jocelyn Veneracion Alfa president Avedon A. Veneracion, Eastern Visayas native, is continuing leather craft different materials such as jute and abaca. Alfa has given a step further with the discovery of jusipol, ancient-native Japanese pineapple-fiber handmade paper.

The wide range of handbags, shoulder bags and totes come in every shape and size imaginable in designs that are stylish and playful with details like polka dots. Resort appliques, multi-colored patchwork and stitching.

Hand-cut bags include the array given a fresh encourage look by the ribbon-striped handbag of pink leather with exotic colored skin printed on jusipol, and the bridal bag made of organza, satin, swarovski and pearls designed by Kenneth Chua.

Alfa's new lines come in classy different styles. The Classic line presents elegant deluxe leather bags both for office and resort wear. The Urban line targets young professionals on-the-go with chic, yet functional bags. The Hype line carries individualistic and hot bags with striking prints of exclusivity. Not to be overlooked is the Artisan Fusion collection of resort bags composed of leather mixed with indigenous materials.

Alfa is located at Lifestyle Center, Eastwood City, Libis, QC.

KENNETH Chua, fashion and bag designer

JIL Louis, Alfa's resort collection designer

GEN Dragon, interior designer of Alfa's Fashion Square store in Eastwood City, Libis

A house is moved, heritage is conserved

THE CHAIR of Noah Ian Tiangco* at heritage restaurant-cafe will likely get a big push with the new coffee-table book, "Tahanan: A House Reborn," by Reynaldo G. Alejandro and Victoria Roman G. Santos.

The book is the story of a family's love affair with their ancestral home. Specifically, it is the story of the patriarch, Roman H. Santos, who, with his first wife Juliana Medina, their seven children, as well as the eight others by a second union, saw to it that the house was more than a shelter — it was part of their lives.

How they tried to preserve it all these years, moving it piece by piece to a new location to save it from ruin, is a case study in heritage conservation on the family level. However, because the house was the setting for several historical events, it could also be considered for historical conservation.

What Roman started Juliana in 1899, he opted to live in Sitanda, Juliana's hometown, even if he was from Pampanga. Sitanda was near the sea, and Roman needed sea air for his health.

He was making various business ventures at the time. It took the couple 18 years to complete the house, in 1917. It was grand — three stories high — and became a landmark in the town. The topmost floor, called the tore, was surrounded by a balcony and thus, enjoyed the open air. The children, when young, loved to play and run around in it.

Coping with highs and lows

Rosarina may have had ups and downs through the years but, due to Roman's thrift and hard work nature, he coped with the problems and was soon a successful, multifaceted businessman with interests in banking, agriculture, factories, real estate and others.

When he died in 1950, his estate was valued at around 14 million, a very substantial amount in those days. His house, at all its century was bequeathed to Alicia, his youngest daughter.

The Santos couple's many ups and downs all over the house, which also reflected the times. Alicia retained as much of those features as possible. The floor, the walls, doors and furnishings, predominantly of wood, were carefully and polished through the years, giving them a beautiful sheen, captured by excellent photos in the book.

Designs of the interiors and furniture, as well as the architecture itself, reflect the '20s and '30s, but are reminiscent in some ways of the bahay na bato of the Spanish era, except that none, straight back chairs have splats in the American Adams style.

In some areas in the rooms, carvings and turnings in Spanish-era fanciful periods as eclectic mix. Elements of Art Nouveau are evident as well. Other bits of memorabilia were retrieved from Attic and long storage when the house was moved to Antipolo.

Photographs of Juliana and the other Santos women have been restored for posterity.

House 'reinserted'

The authors refer to the episode dependent spirit of a family "reinserted" and "reinserted." The act of turning the house was not to remodel or reinvent it, but simply to set it exactly as it was at a different location.

Plans had to be semi-invasive at times, however. The number of steps to the main stairs were raised from three to four, since three was considered bad luck. Portions of the house that were badly damaged or to disrepair were dismantled prior to moving, had to be removed and changed.

Damage was actually the primary reason the house had to be moved. Water seepage, termite infestation, unsteady joists and old electrical installation had taken their toll on the house after eight decades. When it was being put together again in the capital, some rooms had to make way for other needs.

Apart from those, the house is exactly the same, especially from the outside.

What the family did to their beloved old house probably would be instructive for similar conservation problems. The house being a fond three opinions one, transplant the house to a new location; two, declare it obsolete and keep it as a memento or put it to some other use; and three, demolish it and reuse only parts to use as "spares" in a totally new house. As we know, they chose the first.

Dismantling the old house was a big production. It took about two years and 20 cargo trucks to bring the materials from Sitanda to Antipolo. Silly human errors because there would be problems of misfit anyone as in Sitanda. Besides, the framing floor like any surroundings seemed to fit in well with the house.

New generation carries on

Alicia instilled a love for the house in her children, the fourth generation. By 2003, when the transfer was completed, they were ready to take over. Alicia had died before.

Members of this generation now live there, and they have the same ability to complete their mother's task. She wanted what her father and mother wanted — to keep the house, preserve and enjoy it for generations to come.

Some families like to reward their patronage to books by leaving their family two. While significant to these families, others could not relate to them.

In "Tahanan," we can relate to the rise, decline and rise again of a house that figured in the lives of to residents for eight decades. Grand events happened and melodies entered the house, some parts of history, adding an to make as a living memory of a bygone era.

The book may be about one family and their house, but it could well be the story of conservation and preservation of any building that has meaning for us as a people. Those who tried to tear down the old because the new seems more attractive, have a lot of rethinking to do. As what once have said, we are what we have been. Let's give some value to ourselves by remembering who we were, by retaining the treasures of our past.

Printing a by Ananda Publications of Malabon City

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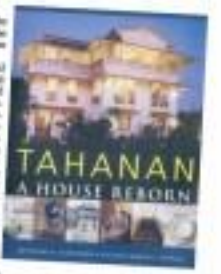


SEEING GREEN

Doris Goukell Nieves

Gift of reading

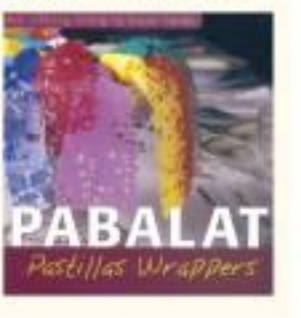
HOT off the press books make great gifts to people who have almost everything.

The first of the Alice Publishers' Lifelong Giving up Inspiration:

"Parol: Christmas Star Lantern" traces the history, development and popularity of the star of hope, the parol of Renaissance Italy up to today's kaleidoscopic Philippine Christmas lantern.

The second volume of the same series is "Pabalat: Pastillas Wrappers," which traces the history and development of the dying art, par Asian, from Chinese paper coin, papel picado of Mexico to the well-known San Miguel, Belarus, tradition of wrapping sweets.

Published by Bramble Publishing, both booklets were written by New York-based artist Reynaldo Catalina Alejandro and Norma Ilustre S. Santos, antiquarian and professional bartaw.



Plant and garden store opens tomorrow

Old City North Silos, which underwent a major facelift recently, will open The Garden, Saturday, Dec. 20.

Located at the front of the mall, The Garden occupies 1,000 sqm of space with sprawling pathways and a special drive-through access.

Fourteen plant growers and garden supply providers share the space, with each parcel averaging 220 sq.m.

Commercial exhibitors include Beauty Blossoms, Mayena Aventus, J. & H. Orchidaceous, Flower Box, Garcia Flowers, Harbor Agribusiness, King Lotus Flowers & Plants, Pavilion on Orchids and Ornamentals, Rumpa International, S&E Plants and Planters, Sultan Heritage, and TG Orchids.

Inquirer Magazine
Lifestyle STYLE

Surprise bash, lovely ladies and a smashing exhibit

HOPING to have a quiet dinner with her children at the chic Cameron House of Stanton East Forbes, she instead got the surprise of her life when her kids, with the help of some close family pals, gave her a super fun night with a surprise birthday bash.

Fashion plate Niarchos, the widow of the well-loved George Pappas, the Greek shipping magnate and founder of Arghapitel Shipping Corporation, was all smiles and thrilled over the party organized by her children—Charmaine, George, Nerissa and Margarita.

WITHOUT BATTING AN EYELASH

Maarit Arciszewski

Photos by Alice Von Hagen and Rodrick Nisay

The party, palong-pasi, was graced by longtime pals and business partners, such as Capt. Hellenic Belenis, who joined in with his wife Irene all the way from Athens, Greece; and the celebrant's close pal, the luminous Bay Arenas, who came in a yellow pantsuit and honored the celebrante with two heart-touching ballads, "Habit' Ko" and "Ito Nalay Ti-Pamamitlan."

Also toasting Nany were her Embassy compang: Chilean Ambassador Carmen Ignazo; British Ambassador Paul Dimond with his wife Carolyn; Libyan Ambassador Salem Shaheti; Slovak Ambassador Enrique Rich-band with her wife Shannon; Portuguese Ambassador Jose Caetano da Silva; Sri Lanka Ambassador Arlya Shanta Rekawa with his wife Elsie; and Syrian Consul Issam El Bela.

A superb dinner was prepared by Nany's favorite caterer, Via Mare, which knew perfectly well some of the celebrant's favorite dishes, including the aperitif, watercress and shiitake mushrooms in parmesan tuile with balsamic vinaigrette dip.

The aperitif was followed by a refreshing potato leek soup in squash shell. The main course was a duette of roast beef with creamy mustard sauce and sea bass with champagne sauce, accompanied by angel's hair pasta with portobello mushrooms and sun-dried tomatoes in extra virgin olive oil.

Dessert was everyone's favorite Via Mare concoction, the Turtle Mango Jubilee, all of the food was decorated with must-have French wines.

Included in the more than 50 guests were Nany's old gang—Ali and Nena Calderon; ex-socialites Kelly Kanagasuri; Letty Rubio, Cora Fajardo, Chit Ortiz, lawyer Manuel Lazaro with wife Rose; and Dr. Robert Cullen with wife Lou—who made the celebration even more memorable, palongpasi.

It definitely was one night when Nany's family and special friends were all invited to share her blessings. The party, enlivened by chamber orchestra music, was truly an affair to remember, palongpasi.

Loveliest

Manila's five loveliest was elegantly staged by the high-watch of the disc pack, Tech-romantics, and the Love Unlimited Orchestra at the Regal Grand Ballroom of Sunyfruit Makati Shangri-La Hotel recently.

The opening number featured the sweet's singer producer-director, Richard Tuan, singing the hot Latin song "Bésame" and the romantic "Moonlight Serenade" with no less than the five girls wearing fashion by Rajo Laurel.

The girls made a second parade wearing stunning formal evening gowns by the chi chi

THE KAMZWORKING officers of Lore 11 Foundation: trustees Maris Kasigbak and Beatrice Go; VP Theresa Santos; chair Nini P. Lacanilao; trustee Helen Ong and Maty Poppen; president Irene M. Francisco; trustee Becky Garcia; and treasurer Mel Nasr

NONG Rosario Tantoco at the recent launching of her book "Buro," which will be available at leading book stores next week; shown with her co-publisher Gina de Venecia, President Macapagal-Arroyo and Marikina Mayor Marides Fernando

Surprise bash, lovely ladies . . .

(From page 19)

friends, in the soulful notes of 17-20.

The third parade, palangges, was definitely the highlight of the evening. Together with handsome escorts, the ladies showed off their dancing skills in an exciting, fun number called "Kapalaran de Goma sa Big-shop," which swept the crowd off their flabuls and Guccis-encased feet. dubbings.

The super interesting scene-scenes AVP clip emphasized that Manila's Pro Lovelies is not just a selection of beauty and brains, but also of personality, character and good breeding. It documented clever young girls in their homes and favorite stores, which definitely showed their stone beauty.

It also allowed the audience to realize how young Zoe century Filipinas think and react to issues and situations today. It showed that this generation today, even if they may sometimes appear reckless and naive, are really very responsible and aware of everything around them.

And lucky for these young misses, they are all blessed with good education and upbringing, socio-civic awareness and good values.

Take your well deserved bow, girls: Crystal Sugatang, Rona Raquel de Boia, J.C. Trinidad Tiu-ona, Rumphre Rolando and Paula Gaerlan!

Design: young turks

After months of sui-hard work, which involved conceptualizing and constructing their designs, the Philippine School of Interior Design graduated Class '03 finally entertained their night of nights, yesterday, with the opening of their graduation exhibit at the 9F Crest Tower on Ayala Avenue.

PSID is manned by talent-propables in the design industry such as administrator Chaes Cazzola, Philippines co-founder and director Edith Sibayan, and dean of students Ate Pambid. It has a respected faculty. Over the years, PSID has proudly produced some of the best interior designers in the country, and its graduation exhibits have served as the launch pad for talented to-thorny neophytes.

Showcasing 33 beautiful booths, the exhibit is dubbed "Isla," as in "Interior Spaces Local Application," a theme inspired by 2003 being the Philippine Tourism Year. The exhibit therefore incorporated the cultures, traditions, indigenous materials, flavors and colors of the different regions of the country in its designs.

It was executed in cooperation with the Department of Tourism and the Metropolitan Museum of Manila.

The guests who marveled at the works of the students individual each bet names as Olongapo City's vibrant Mayor Katz Gordon (representing her hubby, Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon), architect Bobby Mañosa, Metropolitan Museum director Ito Mañalac and publisher Ojaer Hemsaens.

Guests from close by included gorgeous Carmi Martin, who is one of the graduating students; known hotelier Frank Tomas and entertainer Vernie Varga, who performed two songs; Caloocan Mayor Rey Malonzo, and good-looking Blake Mantesupro and his big love, beautiful Marilou Fernandez.

Scouting around for new design ideas were other guests such as Baby Tantoco, Abbi Pascual-etc, Tito and Pattie Tuason, stylish Ruby Fernando, hostess-ver Eva Ahumada, Aurel and Jojo Zaharie, Jo-ann Filmalet, Sorley Garcia, Mars Ann Ojeda Lumen, and designer Gerry Ratig-bak.

Big business names gave full support to the exhibit such as the

MATT Pippen with her beloved children—George, Cristina and Margarita Cuenco

KATY'S GANG (from left) Alfred Hahn, Mona Cuisumbing, Lai Cuñeo, Bb. Roberti Cuñeo and Al Cuisumbing

Chong family, dubbings, of Shell Garuwa, furniture maker Buddy Lagdameo, Jimmy Ong of Boysen, Chris Chong and his parents of Rexis, Michelle Blanco of Ongpin Rosewall, Subic's Margaret Hui Yap, Filinvest Asia Corporation exec Lupe De Guzman and Jun Simbulan, dean Carmelita Lacanilo of the College of St. Benilde, and others.

Remember, as the soul of the day, who would be more excited than the students themselves? As early as now, they have received job offers and clients. Not bad at all, palangges.

Class '03 president John Uson and the hardworking PSID faculty were in bliss over the success of the exhibit. Uson shares the huge success of the show with the other class officers, Caren Martin, Alyza Gonzalez, Jennifer Streefield, Sheng Sinagpan, Chien Ey and Lindy Kuar, as well as with the tireless OK committee led by Monica Baca, Chin Jo Arnaran, Trebie Lucena, Jade Bonifacio, Paolo Soto and Lia Fabia.

Once the congratulations were over, I asked one of the graduates, "Abi, isn your dream has finally come true."

"Yes but," she answered, "the only way it came true, Maurice, was to stay awake and work hard at it."

Amen, babe.

Hey, that must-have coffee-table book, "Buro Philippine Exotic and Intimate," beautifully edited by that multitalented young lady of adventure, Mars Rosario Tantoco, will be ready next week at National Book Store and Magnet nationwide, and the Metropolitan Museum of Manila. It is a great must-have book, it's a must-give gift for the holidays.

Check it out, palangges.

STYLISH PSID administrator Chaes Cazzola Tujano with PSID professor Sophia Dorla and Mary Ann Ojeda Lumen

PSID Bukidnon group members Shaila Perez, Cesi Sanchez, Tin Carvajal, Jammy Rasos, Richard Bernardo with professors Lee Abrantes (third from left) and architect Ed Garrido (second from right)

AT THE PSID graduation exhibit: Tito and Pattie Tuason, Caren Martin and Olongapo City Mayor Katz Gordon